DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 390 370 HE 028 883

AUTHOR	Hall, John; And Others
TITLE	Charters and Change: An Evaluation of the Further and Higher Education Charter for Scotland.
INSTITUTION	Scottish Council for Research in Education, Edinburgh.
SPONS AGENCY	Scottish Office Education Dept., Edinburgh.
REPORT NO	ISBN-1-86003-019-X
PUB DATE	Nov 95
NOTE	79p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Scottish Council for Research in Education, 15 St. John St., Edinburgh EH8 8JR, Scotland, United Kingdom.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Standards; Administrators; College Faculty; Colleges; College Students; Foreign Countries; *Higher Education; Information Dissemination; Participant Satisfaction; Program Evaluation; Program Implementation; *Standards
IDENTIFIERS	*Further and Higher Educ Charter 1993 (Scotland); *Scotland

ABSTRACT

A study was done to evaluate the initial impact of the 1993 Further and Higher Education Charter for Scotland which sets out a framework for the standards of service that students, employers and members of the community can expect from universities and colleges. The main focus of the evaluation was the degree of awareness of the Charter among students, staff, and employers and the extent to which further and higher education institutions were already addressing the areas covered by the Charter. Information was gathered from a variety of respondents including current and potential students, employers, and teaching staff. In addition, detailed studies were carried out at six institutions. Some findings included the following: (1) at all six institutions studied in detail, the Charter had been promoted using publicity materials; (2) staff in Further Education institutions knew of the existence of the Charter, in all other groups only a minority were aware of it; (3) senior staff were quick to point out that their institutions were doing nearly all that the Charter recommended before the publication of the Charter; (4) a survey of all institutions revealed that almost all either had institutional charters or intended to have one; and (5) for the majority of students, their experience of further and higher education lived up to the standards described in the Charter. Includes 27 tables and 24 figures. (JB)

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ED 390 370

Charters and Change

An Evaluation of the Further and Higher Education Charter for Scotland

John Hall
Natalie Fenwick
Teresa Tinklin
Janet Powney

The Scottish Council for Research in Education

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SCRE Research Report No 69

ISBN 1 86003 019 X

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First published November 1995

A report arising from the research project entitled the 'Evaluation of the Further/ Higher Education Charter' (R/7/36) funded by the Scottish Office Education Department between March 1994 and April 1995.

The views expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Scottish Council for Research in Education or the Scottish Office Education Department.

Printed and bound by The Scottish Council for Research in Education, 15 St John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR.

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Acronyms

FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Council
HMI	HM Inspectors of Schools
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
LEC	Local Enterprise Company
NC	National Certificate
SCOTVEC	Scottish Vocational Education Council
SHEFC	Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
SQMS	Scottish Quality Management System
SRC	Students' Representative Council
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification
SWAP	Scottish Wider Access Programme

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the assistance and insights provided by members of the advisory committee throughout the period of study.

We would also like to express our gratitude to all those who took time to complete our questionnaires. These included senior staff and teaching staff in colleges and universities, school leavers, SWAP students and employers. Special thanks are due to the staff and students in the institutions which we visited who gave of their valuable time to be interviewed. The help of those who took part is very much appreciated, as without the benefit of their views the report could not have been written.

Within SCRE our thanks go to Jacqueline Mapp, Margo Reid and Kerry Musselbrook who helped with the student interviews, and to Lynne Edwards who conducted the employer telephone interviews. Thanks also go to Kay Young and Janet Regan for their patient and efficient secretarial support.

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Summary of Findings

In the autumn of 1993 the Scottish Office published the Further and Higher Education (FHE) Charter for Scotland. The FHE Charter sets out a framework for the standards of service that students, employers and members of the community can reasonably expect to receive from universities and colleges in Scotland as regards the provision of education and training. It includes information about the steps individuals can take if their expectations are not met.

The Scottish Council for Research in Education was commissioned to evaluate the initial impact of the Charter. The main areas of interest were awareness of the Charter among students, staff and employers, the extent to which further and higher education institutions were already addressing the areas covered by the Charter or were responding to it.

Information was gathered from a variety of respondents involved with further and higher education, including current and potential students, employers and teaching staff in universities and colleges. Detailed studies were carried out in six institutions.

1. Availability and promotion of the Charter document

1.1 In the six institutions studied in detail, the Charter had been promoted using publicity materials such as summary leaflets and posters. Copies of the Charter had been made available in libraries and other information points.

1.2 Staff in FE colleges had been given copies of the Charter. In the HE institutions the Charter had been 'made available' at committees and other meetings.

2. Awareness and familiarity with the Charter

2.1 A majority of lecturers in FE colleges knew of the existence of the Charter. In all other groups only a minority were aware of it.

2.2 Over half of FE lecturers had read some of the Charter, however only a minority of school leavers, SWAP students, national employers, employers with specific links to FE colleges, current students and HE lecturers had read any of it.

2.3 Familiarity with the detailed contents of the Charter was low. A third of FE teaching staff were familiar with its contents, in all other groups the proportion was much less.

3. Impact of the Charter

3.1 Senior staff were keen to point out that their institutions were doing nearly all that the Charter describes before the publication of the Charter. It was viewed by senior staff as one of a number of recent initiatives, quality assessments and academic audits that have had an impact on college or university life.

3.2 Over half of the FE lecturers who provided information said that the Charter had had an influence on both their institution and their own work. Fewer than one quarter of HE lecturers thought this. The most frequently cited institutional effects of the Charter were that it had led to a formalisation of procedures; had led to an increased perception of students as customers; and had raised awareness of quality issues.

3.3 Teaching staff made negative comments on the impact of the Charter on their own work. It was thought to have increased their workload and the amount of administration they were required to do.

4. Institutional charters

4.1 The survey of all FE and HE institutions in Scotland revealed that almost all either had their own institutional charter in existence, or intended to have one in the future.

4.2 In general, senior staff did not perceive their own institutional charters to have had much impact.

4.3 Awareness of institutional charters was greater than that for the national Charter, and was greater among staff and students in FE than in HE.

4.4 Of those teaching staff who had heard of their own charter, most felt familiar with it.

5. Provision of information

5.1 Majorities of students, national employers and employers with specific links to institutions were satisfied with the information they had received.

5.2 All institutions have made, or were in the process of making, some changes to the information that they provide and the procedures that were in place.

5.3 Most applicants to FE and HE had received adequate information on their proposed course, entry requirements, application procedures, guidance, social facilities and fees and expenses but would have liked more information about other opportunities in education, financial support, quality and how to make their views known.

5.4 Nearly all teaching staff said that they provided their students with information relating to the aims and content of their course, assessment procedures, standards and, where applicable, work placements. The majority of students claimed to have received the above information.

PRESS RELEASE

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SCRE PR 95/012 21 November 1995

Not for use before: 22 November 1995

The Impact of the Further and Higher Education Charter for Scotland

An evaluation of the impact of the *Further and Higher Education Charter for Scotland* has found that while most students' experience lives up to the standards described in the Charter there is relatively little awareness of the Charter itself among teaching staff, students or employers. Awareness is particularly low in higher education. These are among the findings reported today by researchers from the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE). The study also found that most of the institutions surveyed said they either had their own institutional charter or were planning to introduce one. More of the further education than higher education institutions had local charters in place. Staff regarded the Charter as one of a number of recent initiatives, for example quality assessments and academic audits, that had had an impact on college or university life.

From the findings

1. *Availability and promotion of the Charter document:* In the six institutions studied in detail, the Charter had been promoted using publicity materials such as summary leaflets and posters. Copies of the Charter had been made available in libraries and other information points. Staff in further education colleges had been given copies of the Charter. In higher education institutions it had been 'made available' at committees and other meetings.

2. *Awareness and familiarity with the Charter:* A majority of lecturers in further education colleges knew of the existence of the Charter. In all other groups only a minority were aware of it. Familiarity with the detailed contents of the Charter was low. Over half of further education lecturers had read some of the Charter but only a minority of higher education lecturers, current students, school leavers, SWAP students, national employers, and employers with specific links to further education colleges had read any of it.

3. *Impact of the Charter:* Senior staff felt that their institutions had been doing nearly all that the Charter describes before its publication. It was seen as one of a number of recent initiatives to have had an impact on college or university life. Over half of the further education lecturers said that the Charter had had an influence on both their institution and their own work but less than a quarter of

continues

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higher education lecturers thought this. The most frequently cited institutional effects were that it had led to a formalisation of procedures, an increased perception of students as customers, and had raised awareness of quality issues. Teaching staff thought that it had increased their workload and the amount of administration they were required to do.

4. *Institutional charters:* Almost all further education and higher education institutions in Scotland said they either had their own charter, or intended to have one. Awareness of institutional charters was greater than that of the national Charter, and was greater among staff and students in further education than in higher education. Of those teaching staff who had heard of their own charter, most felt familiar with it. In general, senior staff did not perceive their own institutional charters to have had much impact.

5. *Provision of information:* Majorities of students, national employers and employers with links to institutions were satisfied with the information they received. All institutions had made, or were making, some changes to their procedures and the information they provided. Most applicants to further education and higher education had received adequate information about courses, entry requirements, application procedures, guidance, social facilities and fees and expenses but would have liked more information about other opportunities in education, financial support, quality and how to make their views known.

Nearly all teaching staff said that they provided students with information about the aims and content of courses, assessment procedures, standards and, where applicable, work placements. This was supported by a majority of students.

Employers were sure that colleges and universities provided information relating to courses, teaching assessment and work placements. They were less sure whether they could obtain information on the study time required by employees, quality assurance standards and how to make their views known.

6. *Making views known:* The majority of teaching staff said that there were clear policies relating to complaints about teaching, assessment, staff behaviour, facilities and services but most students were unsure if their institution had such policies. Nearly all teaching staff gave students the opportunity to comment on their courses, and senior staff in five of the six institutions sampled said that they survey

the views of students. Around four-fifths of students said that they had the opportunity to express their views on the quality of teaching and other services. Current students also reported having adequate information about how to make their views known to institutions, and about relevant rules and regulations. All the institutions operated formal appeals procedures.

7. *Meeting Charter standards:* For the majority of students, experience of further and higher education met the standards described in the Charter. Students appeared to be happy with their education. Large majorities were satisfied with the quality of education, felt there was a high standard of teaching, said that their grant was paid promptly, and agreed that it was easy to make an appointment with a member of staff to talk about their course. Around two-thirds said that assessed work was returned quickly. Most employers felt that enquiries and complaints were dealt with promptly and courteously. Employers with specific links to individual institutions generally made contact through a particular named individual. Employers were not always sure if institutions had formal complaints procedures.

Notes for editors

1. The evaluation report *Charters and Change: an evaluation of the Further and Higher Education Charter for Scotland* (authors: John Hall, Natalie Fenwick, Teresa Tinklin and Janet Powney), SCRE Research Report No 69, is published on 22 November 1995 and is available from SCRE price £7.50.
2. The *Further and Higher Education Charter for Scotland*, published by the Scottish Office in autumn 1993, sets out a framework for the standards of service that students, employers and members of the community can reasonably expect to receive from universities and colleges as regards the provision of education and training. It includes information about the steps individuals can take if their expectations are not met. The Scottish Council for Research in Education was commissioned by the Scottish Office to evaluate the Charter's initial impact. The project ran from March 1994 to April 1995. Information was gathered from all further and higher education institutions and from a variety of respondents including current and potential students, employers and teaching staff in universities and colleges. Detailed studies were carried out in six institutions.

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Rosemary Wake, Head of Information Services Telephone: 0131 557 2944

5.5 Employers were sure that colleges and universities provided information relating to courses, teaching assessment and work placements. They were less sure whether they could obtain information on the study time required by employees, quality assurance standards and how to make their views known.

6. Making views known

6.1 Nearly all teaching staff gave students the opportunity to comment about their courses, both orally and in writing, and senior staff in five out of the six example institutions mentioned that they survey the views of students.

6.2 The majority of teaching staff said that there were clear policies relating to complaints about teaching, assessment, staff behaviour and facilities and services. Most students, however, were unsure if their institution had such policies.

6.3 Around four-fifths of students said that they have the opportunity to express their views on the quality of teaching and other services.

6.4 Current students reported having adequate levels of information about how to make their views known to institutions, and about relevant rules and regulations. They sought more information about the careers service, equal opportunities policy and quality assurance procedures.

6.5 Senior staff said that they encouraged an informal approach to complaints. They preferred it if students approached a teaching staff member in the first instance. Most students said they would do this in relation to complaints about their course, assessment or staff behaviour. Other avenues of complaint included complaints forms, evaluation forms and student associations. All the institutions operated formal appeals procedures.

6.7 Slightly fewer than three out of ten students had made a complaint to their institution at some time. Approximately half said that these had been dealt with fairly but not always efficiently or thoroughly.

7. Meeting Charter standards

7.1 For the majority of students, experience of further and higher education lives up to the standards described in the Charter. Students appear to be happy with their education. Large majorities of students were satisfied with the quality of education they were getting; felt there was a high standard of teaching at their institution; said that their grant or bursary was paid promptly; and agreed that it was easy to make an appointment with a member of staff to talk about their course. Around two-thirds said that assessed work was returned quickly.

7.2 Most employers felt that enquiries and complaints were dealt with promptly and courteously. Employers with specific links to individual institutions generally made contact through a particular named individual. Employers were not always sure if institutions had formal complaints procedures.

1 Introduction

Background

The government's Citizen's Charter aims to improve the provision of public services by emphasising quality, standards and choice. As part of this initiative each service in the public sector is developing, or has developed, its own charter addressing its own circumstances.

In the autumn of 1993 the Scottish Office published the Further and Higher Education (FHE) Charter for Scotland. The FHE Charter sets out a framework for the standards of service that students, employers and members of the community can reasonably expect to receive from universities and colleges in Scotland as regards the provision of education and training. It includes information about the steps individuals can take if their expectations are not met.

The FHE Charter explains:

- where to find general information on the opportunities available in further and higher education
- how to apply to a university or college
- the types of financial support that are available to students
- how to apply for financial support
- what information colleges and universities should make available to applicants, students, employers and members of the local community
- how quality in further and higher education is monitored
- the ways in which users of further and higher education can make their views known.

The FHE Charter is intended to encourage institutions to maintain high standards of service and to provide accurate information to their users about courses and the range of services and facilities available. It aims to improve access to information about educational opportunities; to help intending students and employers choose the institution and course appropriate to their needs; and to encourage all users of the service to feel free to make their views known.

Aims of the evaluation

In 1993 The Scottish Office Education Department commissioned the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) to undertake an evaluation of the Further and Higher Education Charter for Scotland. Research for the project began in March 1994. The overall aim of the research was to assess the impact of the FHE Charter. Of particular interest were the following:

- awareness of the FHE Charter among relevant groups

- the extent to which student experience matched the main areas covered by the Charter
- changes which further and higher education institutions had made to their procedures and services as a consequence of the publication of the FHE Charter
- mechanisms designed to address problems, difficulties or grievances felt by users, and how well these were working in practice.

Gathering information

Various research methods were used to gather information from different groups who are involved with the further and higher education sector. A summary of the methods used and the groups included in the study is shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Summary of the data

	Target group	Method used
Census	All FE and HE institutions	Questionnaire
Surveys of potential students	School leavers	Questionnaire
	SWAP students	Questionnaire
Institutional visits	Senior staff	Semi-structured interview
	Students	Structured interview
	Teaching staff	Questionnaire
	Employers with links to FE colleges	Structured telephone interview
Survey of employers	Large 'national' employers	Questionnaire

Survey of institutions

In May 1994 all further and higher education institutions in Scotland were contacted and asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to determine the changes which institutions had made to their procedures or information materials as a consequence of the FHE Charter. It also asked whether institutions had published, or intended to publish, their own local charter.

Survey of potential students

Potential students were defined as those who might be considering applying, or had already applied, to an FE college or HE institution. The views of two groups of potential students, school leavers and Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) students, were sought by questionnaire. The questions asked of these groups related primarily to the information they had received to help them to choose the institution and course appropriate to their needs. In addition, questions were asked to determine their level of awareness of the FHE Charter.

Survey of large 'national' employers

Two hundred questionnaires were sent to large 'national' employers. All of the employers surveyed had at least 200 employees and were either based, or had offices, in Scotland. The areas covered in the questionnaire included the information they received from institutions and their awareness of the FHE Charter.

Institutional visits

The main body of research was conducted in six institutions; three further education colleges; a college of education; a former central institution which had recently become a university; and an older, established university. During the autumn term of 1994 each institution was visited for three days by a team of researchers who conducted interviews with senior staff and students. In addition questionnaires were distributed to teaching staff in each institution.

The final part of the research involved telephone interviews with employers with links to the three further education colleges visited. These took place in February 1995.

The structure of the report

The report is divided into ten chapters, of which this is the first. Data from the different groups targeted in the study are reported in the separate chapters. The findings from the census of all Scottish institutions and the surveys of potential students and national employers are reported in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 respectively. Chapter 5 introduces material from the six institutions visited, and explains the methods used. The findings from interviews with senior staff in these institutions are described in Chapter 6. Chapters 7 and 8 report the data from the teaching staff and student surveys conducted in these six institutions, and Chapter 9 describes the interviews with employers with links to FE institutions. Finally, Chapter 10 comments on the most significant findings and highlights some of the issues raised by the data.

References are made in the text to *The Report of Research Among Students, Parents and the General Public for the Further and Higher Education Charter for Scotland*, a report describing research commissioned by the Scottish Office and conducted by the British Market Research Bureau. The purpose of the research was to investigate people's experience of further and higher education and to identify priorities and needs. The information gathered was used in the design of the FHE Charter. Where references are made to this report, it is referred to as the 'Market Research Study'.

A note on statistics

The data gathered by the research were analysed to check for any statistically significant differences between institutions, or between sectors. Wherever possible the chi-square test was used. If this proved inappropriate, the Mann-Whitney U or Kruskall-Wallis test was used. In each case the significance level was $p<0.05$. This means that there is less than one chance in twenty that the responses we obtained could have happened by pure chance. In practice, all statistically significant differences which we found tended to reflect differences between the HE and FE sectors, and not differences between individual institutions.

2 Institutional Responses to the Charter

The sample

All further education (FE) and higher education (HE) institutions in Scotland were contacted and asked to complete a survey questionnaire in May 1994. The HE institutions included universities, and specialist higher education institutions. The FE institutions included all FE colleges and (in the northern islands) FE units. The actual number of FE and HE institutions contacted, and the number of questionnaires returned are shown in Table 2.1. There was an encouragingly high level of response to this questionnaire from both the FE and HE sectors.

Table 2.1: Responses to the census

	Questionnaires sent out	Questionnaires returned	Response rate
FE institutions	46	42	91%
HE institutions	23	19	83%
Total	69	61	88%

The survey questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was designed to elicit basic information on the responses of further and higher education institutions to the publication of the FHE Charter. Each institution was asked about the range of information which it routinely provided to applicants, students, employers and the local community; whether this information had been reviewed in the light of the FHE Charter; and whether the institution published, or intended to publish, its own local charter. A similar set of questions addressed the procedures which were in place in each institution. The particular types of information and procedures which were asked about in the questionnaire were drawn from the topics discussed in the FHE Charter.

Institutional charters

Institutions were asked whether they had produced, or were planning to produce, their own local charter. A charter was described in the questionnaire as any document, or documents, which have been produced and which refer to the areas covered in the FHE Charter. The findings are illustrated in Table 2.2. FE colleges were more likely to have an existing charter than HE institutions. However, almost all either had, or intended to have one in the future.

The three institutions which indicated that they had no plans to produce a charter were all from HE 'constituent colleges' which had some form of affiliation with other HE institutions who did have, or were producing, a charter. It may therefore be the case that these institutions were covered by the local charter of the 'senior partner' institutions. Further investigation revealed that each of these

three institutions had, in fact, made changes to the information they provide and to their procedures in light of the FHE Charter, so it was not the case that they were making no response to it.

Table 2.2: Institutional plans to produce a charter (as at May 1994)

	Higher Education N*=17 %	Further Education N=42 %
We already had a 'Charter' before the publication of the FHE Charter	6	10
We have produced a 'Charter' since the publication of the FHE Charter	0	24
We are currently producing or planning to produce our own 'Charter'	77	67
We have no 'Charter' and no plans to produce one	18	0

* *Number of institutions who answered this question.*

Of those who had produced a local charter or were intending to do so, most referred to the document or documents using the word 'charter'. The majority also agreed that their local charter had been produced because of the publication of the FHE Charter. Two (13%) HE institutions and ten (24%) FE colleges said that their charter had been produced for some other reason.

Responsibility for charter-related matters

Respondents were asked to state the position(s) of the people within their institution who had overall responsibility for matters related to the FHE Charter. Within institutions responsibility could be spread across several levels, as shown in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Responsibility for charter-related matters

	Higher Education %	Further Education %
Principal/Assistant Principal	39	52
Student Services	11	31
Quality Assurance	5	17
Guidance	0	19
Registrar	37	0
Marketing	0	14
Secretary of College/University	26	0
Customer Service	5	5

Percentages add up to more than 100% as multiple responses were allowed.

There appears to be a different emphasis between HE and FE institutions. HE institutions show a greater tendency to invest at least some responsibility for charter-related matters in senior administrative figures (registrar or secretary),

while FE institutions show a greater tendency to place responsibility with senior academic staff (principal and/or assistant principal), or with quality assurance or guidance staff.

At least one possible explanation for this may lie in the relative sizes of HE and FE institutions. HE institutions tend to be much larger and have a tradition of separate administrative departments. In the FE sector, not only are many of the institutions smaller, but there is also a tradition of administrative roles being performed by senior academic staff. Discussion with representatives from each sector has confirmed this as a reasonable interpretation of this finding.

Review of information

All institutions were asked about the extent to which they had reviewed and revised the information which they make available to students, employers and the local community since the publication of the FHE Charter.

The responses of those who indicated that they had reviewed their information are shown in Tables 2.4 and 2.5, with HE and FE institutions shown separately. Only a minority of institutions said that they had not reviewed or did not provide the information requested. In both sectors the greatest amount of change appears to have been to complaints procedures. Higher education institutions were more often likely to have reviewed the information which they make available and found it satisfactory.

Several respondents enclosed notes with their replies saying that the changes which they had made were not a direct response to the FHE Charter. Several also amended the actual items in the questionnaire to indicate that revisions were for reasons other than the FHE Charter, or that review was continuing and not yet complete.

Table 2.4: Extent to which HE institutions have reviewed the information which they make available

Information ...	Reviewed and altered %	Reviewed and found satisfactory %
- on courses available	47	41
- on applying	22	72
- on sources of financial assistance	17	72
- on guidance facilities and services	31	62
- on steps taken to assure the quality of teaching and services	31	56
- on the institution's equal opportunity policy	44	38
- for employers	24	53
- about services available to the local community	19	50
- on complaints procedures	75	19
- on graduate destinations	6	75

Table 2.5: Extent to which FE institutions have reviewed the information which they make available

Information ...	Reviewed and altered %	Reviewed and found satisfactory %
- on courses available	66	29
- on applying	61	34
- on sources of financial assistance	39	49
- on guidance facilities and services	56	34
- on steps taken to assure the quality of teaching and services	62	26
- on the institution's equal opportunity policy	45	43
- for employers	50	31
- about services available to the local community	43	19
- on complaints procedures	68	15
- on graduate destinations	49	23

There were almost no statistically significant differences between the responses of HE and FE institutions to these questions. The sole exception is the item 'information on applying' where HE institutions tended to have reviewed their information and found it satisfactory while FE institutions tended to have reviewed it and altered it as a result. Given that FE colleges have recently undergone incorporation, it is perhaps not surprising to find that they have been revising the information on applying which they make available.

In addition to the information covering the areas outlined in Tables 2.4 and 2.5, several institutions produced other information covering further areas of interest. Seven HE institutions (47% of sample) and fifteen (38%) FE institutions mentioned such additional information which had been produced in response to the FHE Charter. The areas covered were very varied and included production of a student handbook (4 institutions, all FE); 'academic appeals' (2 institutions, 1 HE, 1 FE); 'customer care' (2 FE); specific course information (2 FE); 'harassment policy' (1 FE); 'student entitlements' (1 FE); 'data protection' (1 HE); 'registry guide' (1 HE); and 'industrial links' (1 HE).

■ Revision of procedures

As well as asking respondents about the information which they make available, respondents were also asked about the extent to which they had reviewed and revised institutional procedures since the publication of the FHE Charter. These procedures were to do with a range of topics as set out in the Charter itself, and concerned applications, pastoral, guidance and support services and communications. The responses of those who claimed to have reviewed their procedures are shown in Tables 2.6 and 2.7, with HE and FE institutions shown separately. Only a minority of institutions said that they had not reviewed or do not have in place the procedures listed in the questionnaire.

Table 2.6: Extent to which HE institutions have reviewed their procedures

Procedure ...	Reviewed and amended %	Reviewed and found satisfactory %
- The way in which applications and application enquiries are dealt with	12	62
- The provision made for students with disabilities	47	41
- The provision made for students with learning difficulties	44	31
- The operation of an equal opportunities policy	29	41
- The provision of careers guidance for students	12	75
- The provision of pastoral guidance and welfare services for students	25	62
- The way in which students are informed of the services available	56	31
- The quality assurance of teaching, assessment and research	25	56
- The way in which feedback is sought from students employers and the local community	20	67
- The way in which complaints are dealt with	59	12

Table 2.7: Extent to which FE institutions have reviewed their procedures

Procedure ...	Reviewed and amended %	Reviewed and found satisfactory %
- The way in which applications and application enquiries are dealt with	70	25
- The provision made for students with disabilities	34	39
- The provision made for students with learning difficulties	41	39
- The operation of an equal opportunities policy	32	48
- The provision of careers guidance for students	49	38
- The provision of pastoral guidance and welfare services for students	40	45
- The way in which students are informed of the services available	60	28
- The quality assurance of teaching, assessment and research	54	32
- The way in which feedback is sought from students employers and the local community	60	32
- The way in which complaints are dealt with	65	18

Three statistically significant differences between HE and FE institutions were apparent from their responses. FE institutions were more likely to have revised their applications procedures than were HE institutions. This again reflects recent incorporation of FE colleges. FE institutions were also more likely to have made changes to their provision of careers guidance, and to the ways in which they seek feedback from students, employers, and the local community.

Other procedural changes which institutions mentioned as having been brought about in response to the Charter, and which were not included on the questionnaire, included: changes to 'student financial control' (1 FE institution); 'staff development' (1 HE); 'training' (1 FE); 'student support services' (1 FE); 'student induction' (1 FE); 'pre-entry guidance' (1 FE); and 'advance planning' (1 FE).

Discussion

A general impression which arises from the preceding data is that there appears to be a greater tendency for FE institutions to have amended their information or procedures as a result of having reviewed them. This must be seen against the background of the many changes which have taken place in FE in recent years. Whilst HE institutions have traditionally enjoyed a high measure of autonomy, and have carried the responsibilities which that entails, it is only recently that FE institutions have become independent incorporated bodies, with an increased responsibility for making and implementing their own policies. This may well account for the greater amount of revision of information and procedures apparent in their responses. However, new demands being made by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and by the Higher Education Quality Council may bring about increasing changes in the HE sector in years to come.

3 Potential Students' Knowledge of the Charter

The FHE Charter includes information which is relevant to those applying to FE and HE institutions. We therefore asked potential students about their level of awareness of the FHE Charter, their knowledge of the information it contains and where they had acquired this knowledge.

The sample

The views of two groups of potential students, school leavers and Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) students, were surveyed by questionnaire. School leavers were chosen because they represent the largest cohort entering the FHE sector. SWAP students are an accessible group of adult returners to education and it was of particular interest to the funders of the research to determine the information which is made available to them. The survey was conducted in the summer of 1994 at a time when those leaving school and those finishing SWAP courses would be considering their next steps. The questions sought data on:

- the information applicants to FHE had received
- where this information had been obtained
- awareness of the FHE Charter.

In four secondary schools in Scotland pupils who had been identified as intending to leave that year were asked to complete questionnaires. The schools chosen were all large and were therefore likely to include pupils leaving to go to a range of different destinations. SWAP students from four FE colleges (at least one in each of the three SWAP consortia) in Scotland were also asked to complete questionnaires. The number of potential students contacted, and response rates for the different groups are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Responses to the survey of potential students

	Questionnaires sent out	Questionnaires returned	Response rate
School leavers	547	309	56%
SWAP students	169	105	62%
Total	716	414	58%

Of those school leavers who returned questionnaires, a little over half had just completed S6. Twenty two percent and 24% had just completed S4 and S5 respectively.

Respondents were asked what they were hoping to do at the beginning of the next academic year. The responses to this question are shown in Table 3.2. As would be expected nearly all of the SWAP students intended to begin a full-time course at an HE institution the following year. Over half of the school leavers

intended to go on to college or university, most of them having just completed S6. Table 3.3 illustrates separately the number of applicants to FE and HE.

Table 3.2: Plans for the next academic year

	School leavers N=306 %	SWAP students N=105 %
Begin a full-time course at a college or university	57	90
Get a full-time job	28	4
Get a job with part-time training at college	9	2
Other	6	4

Table 3.3: Applications to FE and HE

	School leavers N=270 %	SWAP students N=103 %
Applied to HE only	32	84
Applied to FE only	38	11
Applied to both FE and HE	4	2
Not applied	25	3

A note on statistics

Where differences between responses from those applying to FE and HE are reported, they relate to the school leaver data as nearly all of the SWAP students were applying to HE only.

■ Awareness of the FHE Charter

Respondents were asked if they had heard of the Charter. Table 3.4 illustrates the findings. In total, 30% of school leavers and 21% of SWAP students were aware of its existence. Those school leavers applying to HE were more likely to have heard of the Charter. Only a small minority of either school leavers or SWAP students had read any of it.

Those who had indicated that they had read the Charter were asked where they had obtained a copy. Most had got their copy from the school or college they were attending at the time of the survey.

Table 3.4: Awareness of the FHE Charter

	School leavers N=290 %	SWAP students N=98 %
Heard of FHE Charter and read some of it	7	5
Heard of FHE Charter and not read it	23	16
Not heard of FHE Charter	70	77

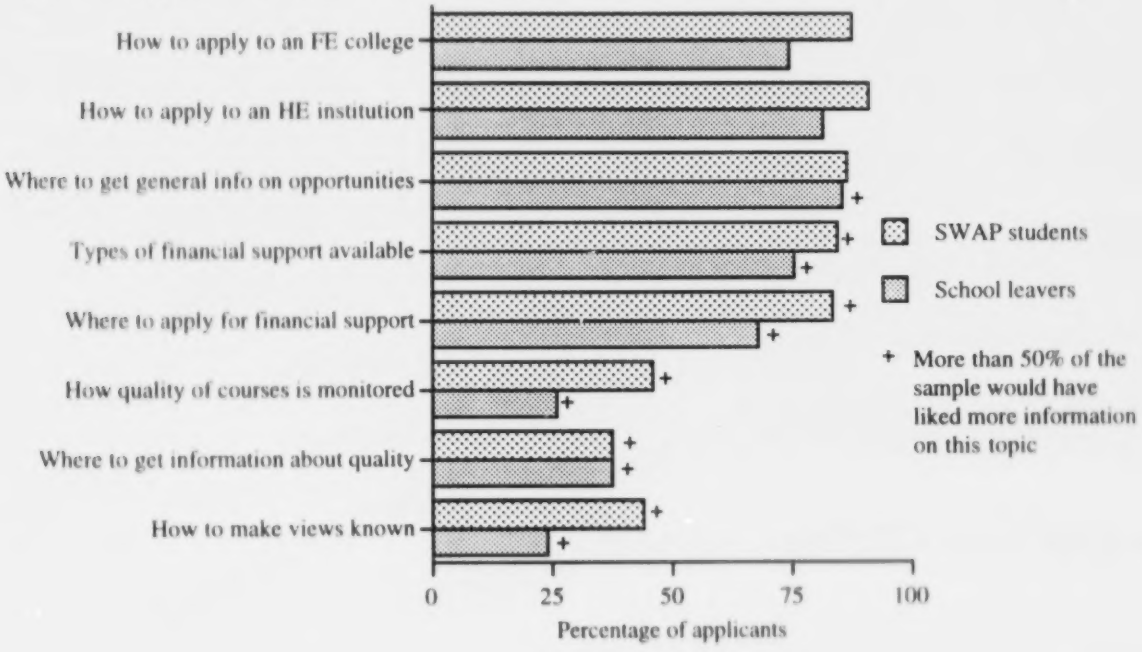
Knowledge of the contents of the FHE Charter

The FHE Charter contains specific information which is relevant to those applying to FE and HE institutions. This includes:

- how to apply to colleges and universities
- where to get general information about the opportunities available in FE and HE
- the types of financial support which are available to students
- where to apply for financial support
- how quality is monitored in colleges and universities
- where to get information on quality
- ways in which applicants can make their views known if they are not happy with the services or information that colleges or universities provide.

Those who had applied, or were intending to apply, to a college or university were asked if they had received enough of the above information to help them choose and apply to an institution appropriate to their needs. Figure 3.1 shows those applicants who had received at least some information. Some of these stated that they would have liked more information than they had received on the topic.

Figure 3.1: Applicants who had received some information


How to apply to an FE college
How to apply to an HE institution
Where to get general info on opportunities
Types of financial support available
Where to apply for financial support
How quality of courses is monitored
Where to get information about quality
How to make views known
SWAP students
School leavers
+ More than 50% of the sample would have liked more information on this topic
0
25
50
75
100
Percentage of applicants

The majority of applicants had received at least some information about how to apply to a college or university, about where to get general information on the opportunities available in FE and HE and about getting financial support while studying. Most applicants, however, did not report having received any

information at all about how the quality of courses is monitored, about where to get information on the quality of courses and about how to make their views known if they were not happy with the services or information provided by colleges and universities. Most of these respondents indicated that they would have liked to have received information on these topics. The increasing use of quality audit procedures in further and higher education may be expected to have an impact in this area.

Applicants were asked where they had obtained the above information. Tables 3.5 and 3.6 show where the percentage of those applicants who had received some information had obtained it from.

Table 3.5: Where did the school leavers applying to FHE get their information?

	School staff %	School library/ careers staff %	Institution applied to %	FHE Charter %
How to apply to an FE college	53*	51	22	1
How to apply to an HE institution	63	50	28	2
Where to get general information on opportunities	37	60	40	4
Types of financial support available	43	29	33	2
Where to apply for financial support	44	21	30	2
How quality of courses is monitored	12	21	49	3
Where to get information about quality	17	38	41	8
How to make views known	14	23	41	8

Note: *Percentages are of those school leavers who had received some information. Respondents were allowed multiple responses.*

Table 3.6: Where did SWAP students applying to FHE get their information?

	College staff %	Library/ careers staff %	Institution applied to %	FHE Charter %
How to apply to an FE college	60*	13	36	1
How to apply to an HE institution	66	12	42	0
Where to get general information on opportunities	43	23	41	0
Types of financial support available	55	10	20	4
Where to apply for financial support	58	6	19	0
How quality of courses is monitored	68	10	15	2
Where to get information about quality	62	4	24	0
How to make views known	75	8	15	11

Note: *Percentages are of those SWAP students who had received some information. Respondents were allowed multiple responses.*

The majority of school leavers and SWAP students who had received information on application procedures and financial support had obtained it from staff at the school or college they were attending. Indeed, SWAP students most frequently obtained each of the items of information from staff in their current college. School leavers, on the other hand, were more likely to have acquired information about general opportunities available in FHE from the school library or careers service and they were more likely to have obtained information related to quality and how to make their views known from the institution to which they had applied. Very few applicants had obtained the information from the Charter.

Information provided to applicants by institutions

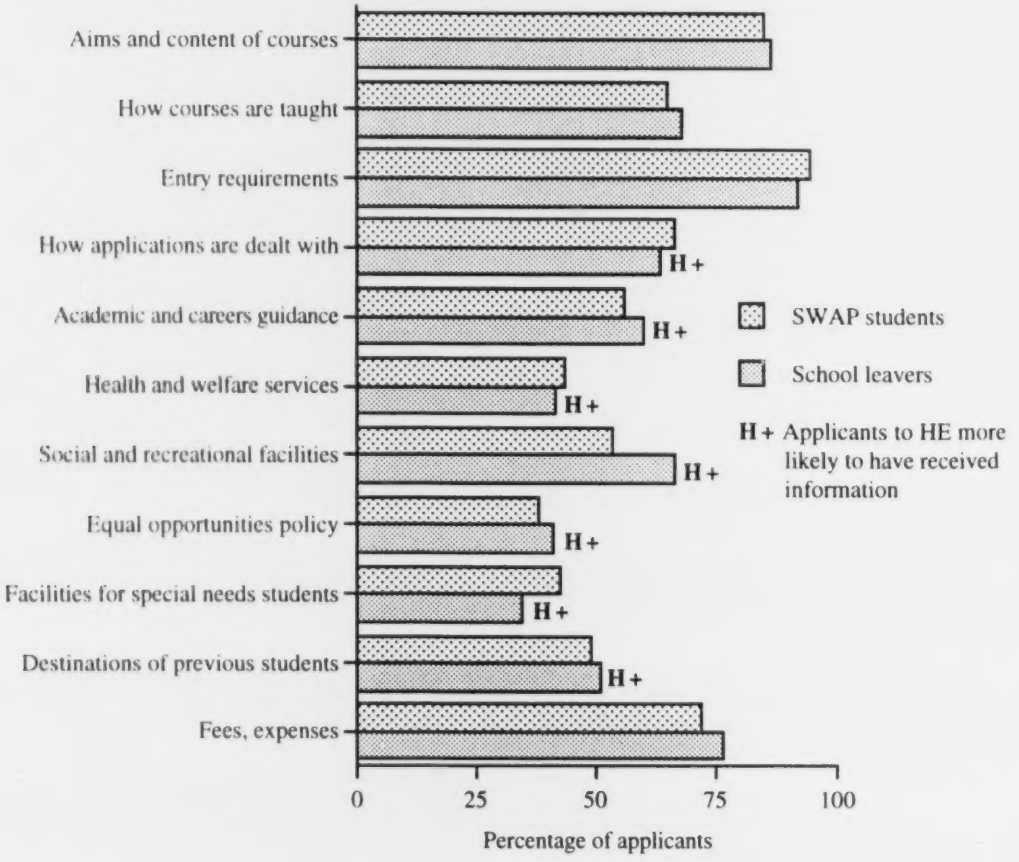
The FHE Charter describes the information that applicants should receive from the colleges or universities they apply to in order to help them select a suitable course and institution. The Charter states that colleges and universities should provide information on:

- aims and contents of courses
- how courses are taught, supervised and assessed
- entry requirements
- how applications are dealt with
- academic and careers guidance provided by institutions
- health and welfare services provided by institutions
- social and recreational facilities available in institutions
- equal opportunities policy
- facilities available for students with disabilities or learning difficulties
- the destinations of previous students
- fees, expenses and other costs involved in attending a college or university.

Applicants to FHE were asked whether they had received the above information from some or all of the institutions to which they were applying. Figure 3.2 illustrates the proportion of applicants who said that they had received information from at least some of the institutions to which they were applying. It is worth noting that most had received information relating to the aims, content and teaching methods of the courses offered. Given that the Market Research Study (see chapter one of this report) identified that two of the most important issues influencing students in their choice of institution were the suitability of the course and the way it would be taught, this is an important finding. Potential students appear to be receiving the information which is most important to them in selecting a course and institution. The Market Research Study, however, also found that the proportion of students getting jobs at the end of a course was another major factor influencing their choice. Only 51% of school leavers and 49% of SWAP students claimed to have received information relating to the destinations of the previous students from any of the institutions to which they had applied.

Only a minority of school leavers and SWAP students applying to FHE had received information from any institutions on equal opportunities, health and welfare services or facilities for those with special needs.

Figure 3.2: Information received from at least some FHE institutions applied to



There were differences between the amounts of information received by those applying to FE and HE. It appears that HE institutions provide more information to their potential students. Those applying to HE were more likely to have received information relating to seven of the areas described.

4 National Employers' Knowledge of the Charter

Many employers recruit students. In addition to recruitment, employers work with colleges and universities in a variety of ways. Some offer work placements, sponsor students and facilities, or commission research and training. Recent developments encourage education providers and employers to collaborate in course development and work-based assessment. Increasingly, employers are represented on university courts and college governing bodies, where they contribute to the overall management of the institutions.

The FHE Charter includes a section designed specifically for employers which describes the information to which they should have access in colleges and universities. It was of interest to the research to discover whether employers knew if the institutions with which they were involved provided the information detailed in the Charter and also whether they were aware of the Charter document itself.

The sample

The views of 'large' employers (those with over 200 employees) were surveyed by questionnaire. The areas addressed in the questionnaire included:

- their awareness of the FHE Charter
- the information that institutions provide
- their communication with FHE institutions.

Two hundred questionnaires were sent to employers, of which 66 were returned (33%). Nearly half (46%) of the employers who responded to the survey had their head offices in Scotland, the remainder however all had offices in Scotland. Fifty three percent of the sample employed over 500 staff in Scotland. Table 4.1 illustrates the different types of work carried out by the employers who responded to the survey.

Table 4.1: Work carried out by employers who responded to the survey

Type of work ...	(N=66) %
Manufacturing industry	23
Government	20
Finance	12
Public Services	11
Construction/engineering	11
Other	23

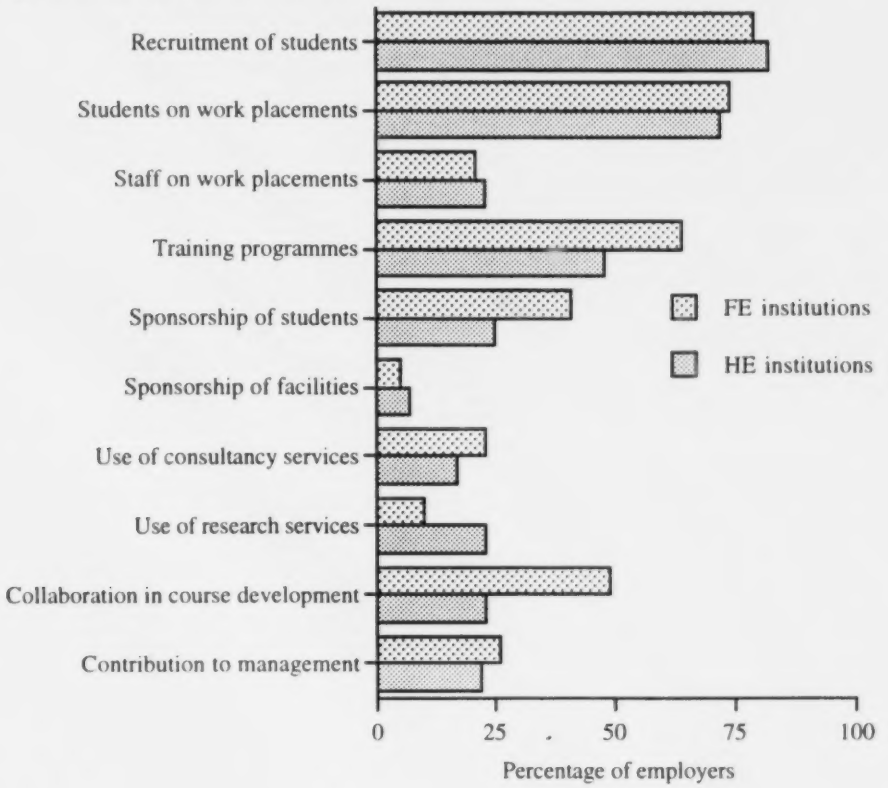
Involvement in FE and HE

Empioyers were asked the ways in which they were involved with colleges and universities. The questionnaire detailed a number of different types of involvement. These included:

- recruitment of students who had completed their courses
- students involved in work placements at the organisation
- college/university staff involved in work placements at organisation
- use of training programmes for employees
- sponsorship of students
- sponsorship of facilities
- use of consultancy services
- use of college/university's research services
- collaboration with college/university in course development
- contribution to overall management (e.g. representation on university court or college governing body).

Nearly all of the organisations were involved with HE institutions in one or more of the above ways. Three quarters were involved in some way with FE colleges. Figure 4.1 shows the proportion of employers involved in these activities with colleges or universities. The percentages illustrated are percentages of those employers who claimed to have some involvement with FE or HE institutions.

Figure 4.1: Employer involvement with institutions



Slightly over three-quarters of the organisations claimed to recruit students who have completed FE or HE courses. A similar proportion also had students involved in work placements in their organisation. Employers were more likely to use training programmes in FE colleges than HE institutions for their employees, and were more likely to collaborate with FE colleges in course development.

■ Awareness of the FHE Charter

The questionnaire asked employers whether they had heard of the Further and Higher Education Charter and if so how familiar they were with its contents: 35% of employers claimed to have heard of the Charter and 6% said that they had read some of it. Half of those who were aware of the Charter had first heard of it through the media. A further 36% had heard of it from a college or university. However only 3% of the respondents claimed to be familiar with the contents of the Charter.

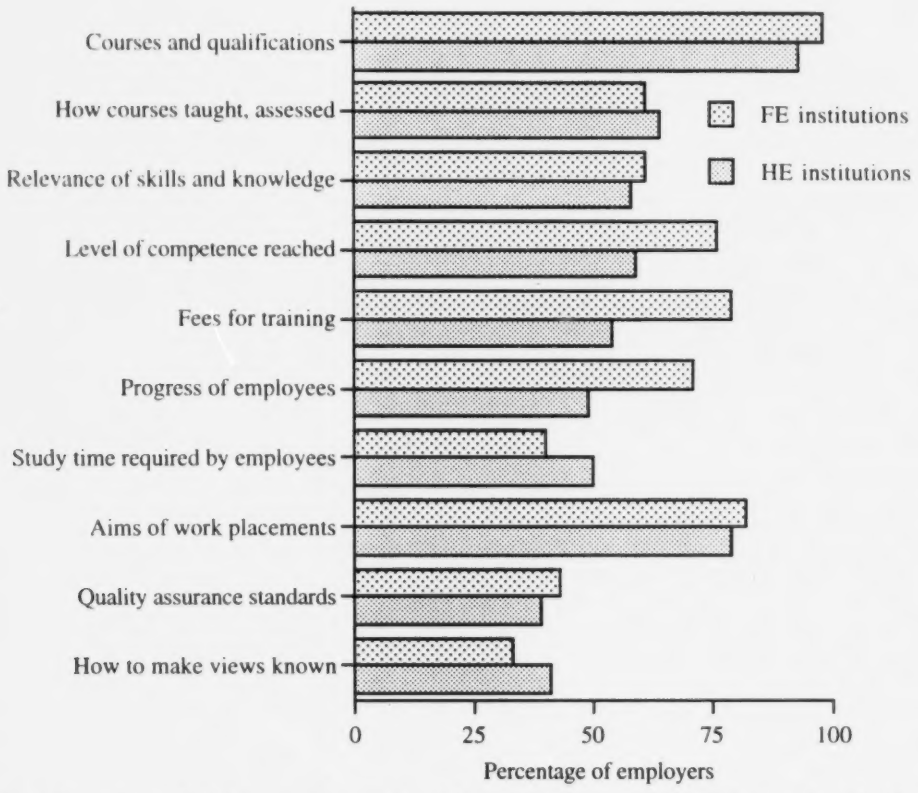
■ The provision of information

The Charter states that institutions will normally be willing to provide employers with information on:

- the range of courses and qualifications offered
- how courses are taught and assessed
- the relevance to the work environment of skills and knowledge gained on courses
- the level of competence reached by students completing courses
- the fees charged for training and other services
- the progress of employees undertaking sponsored study
- the amount of study time required by employees undertaking study
- the aims and objectives of work placements for students or staff from the college or university
- any quality assurance standards the institution has been awarded
- how they can make their views known, and how to complain if they are not satisfied with the service they receive.

Employers were asked in the questionnaire whether they knew if all, some or none of the institutions with which they were involved provided the information set out above. Figure 4.2 shows the proportion of employers who thought that the information was provided by at least some of the institutions they were involved with. Most employers were sure that colleges and universities provided information relating to different aspects of their courses. They were less sure, however, whether they could obtain information on the study time required by employees, quality assurance standards and how to make their views known. Nearly half of the sample said that none of the further education colleges they were involved with provided information on study time required by employees and how to make their views known.

Figure 4.2: Employer awareness of the information provided by at least some institutions



Satisfaction with information received from colleges and universities was high. Over 80% of employers were satisfied with the information they had received, however only a tiny minority claimed to be very satisfied.

The questionnaire also asked employers whether they felt that they had access to enough information about the institutions with which they were involved to help them to recruit suitably qualified employees. Only 9% of employers felt that was true of all FE colleges, however nearly half (46%) felt it was true of some. Twenty percent thought that all HE institutions provided sufficient information and a further 49% felt that some HE institutions provided sufficient information.

Employers were given the opportunity on the questionnaire to comment on whether they felt there was any information which they would like to receive from institutions that they felt was not provided. Very few chose to comment. Two employers felt there was a need for more detailed information on the progress of students, and two would prefer easier access to key individuals.

> *Lack of information on students progress causes tremendous problems. Also lack of course cost information delays grant applications.*
>
> *Easier access to key members of departments — including those involved with student administration details.*

Communication with colleges and universities

The Charter states that enquiries to institutions should be dealt with promptly and courteously, and employers should have access to a named individual as a first point of contact who can offer advice and further information on the institution. The questionnaire asked if this was the case and the findings are illustrated in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Employer communication with FE and HE institutions

		True of all %	True of some %	True of none %	Don't know %
Enquiries to the institution are dealt with promptly	FE	20	71	6	2
	HE	16	75	5	4
Enquiries to the institution are dealt with courteously	FE	37	59	2	2
	HE	36	64	0	0
Access to a named individual as a point of contact for advice and information	FE	23	44	25	8
	HE	22	46	20	13

The responses in relation to FE and HE institutions were very similar. Most employers felt that enquiries were dealt with promptly and courteously in at least some of the institutions with which they were involved. Over one third felt they were dealt with courteously in all institutions. Nearly one quarter of employers said that they did not have access to a named individual as a point of contact in any of the institutions they dealt with.

5 The Charter in Practice

In order to gather detailed information about the impact of the FHE Charter on institutions, the main body of the research was focused on six institutions in Scotland. These were; three FE colleges; a college of education; a former central institution which recently became a university; and an older, established university.

The method used

The same basic method was followed for each of the institutions. Each was visited for three days by a team of four researchers who conducted interviews with senior staff and students. In addition, questionnaires were distributed to teaching staff and telephone interviews were conducted with employers who had links to the three further education colleges.

Interviews with senior staff

A total of 30 face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with between three and seven staff from each institution visited. The staff included those responsible for Charter-related matters and those involved with initiatives connected to the topics addressed by the FHE Charter, for example quality assurance. In three of the institutions, interviews were also conducted with a member of the Students' Representative Council (SRC). The topics discussed in the staff and SRC interviews focused on perceptions of the impact of the FHE Charter and any responses the institution had made to it. The semi-structured interview technique allowed in-depth exploration of these responses to the FHE Charter and the issues raised by it.

Interviews with students

One hundred face-to-face structured interviews, of the type common in market research studies, were conducted in each institution visited (giving a total of 600 completed interviews). The areas explored in the student interviews included: the information students had received about courses, facilities, procedures and policies and their satisfaction with it; the procedures they would follow if they weren't happy with different aspects of their education; and their awareness of the FHE Charter.

Survey of teaching staff

One hundred questionnaires were distributed to teaching staff across a range of departments in all but one of the institutions visited. In the remaining institution, where the total number of teaching staff was 55, a questionnaire was sent to each teaching staff member. In total, 555 questionnaires were distributed and, of these, 309 (56%) were returned. The questionnaire was designed to determine

the information that staff members provide for their students, their awareness of the FHE Charter and their perception of its impact.

Interviews with employers

Each of the three further education colleges used as example institutions provided the names and addresses of a number of employers with whom they have links. The employers could be linked either because they used the college for training employees, because they regularly recruited from the college, or because they used college consultancy or other services. Fifty nine employers were contacted and asked to participate in a telephone interview. A total of 36 completed interviews were conducted. The focus of the interviews was on the information they had received from the college, how they would make their views known if they were not happy with the service they received from the college and their knowledge and awareness of the FHE Charter.

Presentation of the institutional data

The views of senior staff, teaching staff and students in the example institutions are reported in separate chapters. Chapter 6 documents the views of senior staff and each example institution is reported as a separate section. This allows the reader to gain a general impression of the impact of the Charter on individual colleges and universities.

There were too few significant differences between the views of teaching staff and students from the individual institutions to merit reporting their views separately. There were a number of differences, however, between the views of those from FE colleges and those from HE institutions. Chapters 7, 8 and 9, therefore, do not report the data from each of the example institutions separately. Instead, the views of teaching staff, students and local employers are described and the differing responses of those from FE and HE are highlighted.

6 The Views of Senior Staff

Interviews with senior staff allowed in-depth exploration of the impact of the FHE Charter and issues arising from it. The topics discussed in staff interviews which related to their institution included:

- availability and promotion of the FHE Charter to staff and students
- impact of the FHE Charter on information, procedures and services
- institutional charters and their impact
- grievance procedures.

Staff were also asked general questions relating to their perception of the Charter document itself.

In order to give an impression of the impact of the Charter on different organisations and the individual responses that they have made to its publication, the views of the senior staff in individual institutions are documented separately. The final section of this chapter summarises senior staff views on the appropriateness of the contents of the FHE Charter.

Institution A

Situated in a rural area, Institution A is a small FE college offering a wide range of full-time and part-time SCOTVEC courses, as well as some specialist courses.

Availability and promotion of the FHE Charter

Staff and the Students' Association received copies of the Charter while students were distributed with the summary leaflets. Leaflets were also widely distributed and were available in the reception area and library in the college. Staff had been made aware of the FHE Charter, and the charter produced by the college, through staff development seminars organised by the guidance co-ordinator.

The institutional charters

The college development plan required staff to detail what they were intending to do to implement the FHE Charter. Staff therefore felt that it would be appropriate to develop their own charters, although they did not feel these were entirely necessary:

I don't honestly think it was done with any great expectations of a huge impact.

The process was, however, perceived to be a useful marketing exercise in that it was an opportunity to demonstrate how the college was far exceeding the standards laid down in the FHE Charter.

Charters for both students and employers were produced. They were circulated for the first time in the autumn term of 1994, just before the researchers visited the

institution. The charters compare the minimum standards as detailed in the FHE Charter with the enhanced services offered in the college. They also include information on how views can be made known. The student and employer charters state that the college, 'promises not only to meet these Scottish Office standards but also to provide a service which extends considerably beyond them.'

The student charter is in the form of a small booklet which is included in the welcome pack issued to all full-time students during their induction programme. Staff were unsure, however, whether many students would have paid much attention to it:

> *My suspicion is that they are so swamped with all the information that they get at the beginning of the course that they will put this away in a file and they will never look at it again during their entire student career unless maybe there's a problem.*

Impact of the Charter

All staff interviewed were keen to stress that the college was already adequately covering the areas included in the FHE Charter prior to its publication:

> *I think virtually everything in the Charter was already being covered at least to that degree and in some cases way beyond.*

The FHE Charter, however, was acknowledged by some senior staff to have had some impact in that it had encouraged them to look closely at what they were doing and to formalise some procedures which were already in place:

> *It gives you a benchmark. No matter how good the system is it can always be improved.*

> *So I think really that's the impact of this ... a lot of formalising what we had been doing for a long time.*

Senior staff were asked in interview whether they felt the Charter had had any impact on the information they provide. Most information detailed in the Charter is provided in the comprehensive student handbook which is issued as part of a welcome pack to full-time students during their induction programme:

> *Everything you need to know about the college is contained in that handbook from canteen times to student meetings.*

One area in which the Charter was felt to have had an impact was on information about the facilities for disabled students. This information has now been documented. This, however, appeared to be the only example cited:

> *I think the Charter has had an input into it but I don't think it's a major one. I think if we had been the sort of college where we hadn't a lot of these things in place, then fair enough, I would say it would have had a major impact.*

All of the procedures and policies outlined in the Charter were already in place in the college when the Charter was published. Its impact on these areas was therefore minimal:

> *In some ways perhaps there has been a minor impact in just dotting the i's and crossing the t's.*

Senior staff in Institution A felt that meeting the comprehensive quality assurance criteria laid down by SCOTVEC and the Scottish Quality Management System (SQMS) had had more impact than the Charter initiative and indeed encompassed

all that the Charter was trying to achieve. In addition, the college encourages students to give feedback on the service it provides. Three times a year students are invited to complete questionnaires which cover all aspects of their education including interview procedures, courses, workload, facilities, careers advice and guidance. A follow-up questionnaire is issued to students who have left the college which aims to determine the usefulness of their courses to them. Feedback from students was thought to have had a significant impact on information and procedures:

> *We listen to our students .. basically I think that is where the information comes back that allows you to evaluate the systems you've got, look at them again and amend them..*

Grievance procedures

If students have a complaint they are encouraged to speak with their course tutor in the first instance, particularly in relation to academic matters. The course tutor will then know how to proceed. For non-academic matters they can make their views known through the Students' Association which meets regularly. Students can also express their views when they complete the student surveys. For complaints about assessment there is a formal academic appeals procedure. Staff felt it was important for the system to be flexible:

> *You've got to be flexible with the student. You can't say you have got to go to Mrs so and so, because sometimes that's where the problem lies.*

These procedures are documented in the student charter, and are explained to students during their induction programme. These procedures were in place before the publication of the FHE Charter and had not been affected by it. Staff felt that the procedures were working well:

> *I think most things are dealt with at the lowest level which is the way it should be and I think 90% of grievances or problems are perfectly adequately handled by the course tutor and most of the time relate to some kind of reassurance.*

Institution B

Institution B is an FE college located in a densely populated area. It is a community college which offers a diverse range of courses and qualifications which can be completed on a part-time, full-time or evening basis. The college also offers courses through a flexible learning unit for those who cannot attend college regularly and there are courses held outwith the college in local centres.

Availability and promotion of the FHE Charter

When the FHE Charter was published each full-time student in the college received a copy, as did most staff. The Charter was well publicised across the college with copies available in the student services area and library, and publicity material displayed on notice boards. It also featured as an article in the college newsletter.

The institutional charter

The college produced a 'learner charter' for its students a year in advance of the publication of the FHE Charter. This had arisen out of a quality initiative that the

college had been involved in at the time. It was felt that the college needed to set out clearly what it was offering students, almost on a contractual basis, as well as what it expected of students in return:

> *The learner charter was designed to let them know that we were interested in their side of the process as well and it was a process that had responsibilities as well as rights.*

The Students Association was consulted in the production of the charter, and their comments were invited when a draft copy was available.

The learner charter is a single paged document which is included as a page in the student induction handbook issued to new students. Teaching staff ensure that each new student has a copy of the induction handbook by making them sign for it. The learner charter is also displayed in poster form at a number of points in the college.

The learner charter sets out what every student at the college is entitled to, for example in terms of the provision of guidance and learning support. In addition it sets out what the college expects of students in return such as regular attendance at classes. This was seen as a formalisation of previously implicit assumptions:

> *Whereas before we maybe gave them information, told them things it wasn't written down that they had a right to it.*

Senior staff were unsure of the impact of their learner charter as it was one of many things which were on-going in the college. Its existence had perhaps made staff more accountable than they had previously been and had made them view their students more as clients or customers. There were some disadvantages seen in this:

> *The issue is that we provide the ammunition for them to shoot us with.*

There was a suspicion among staff that despite publicity for the learner charter, few students would be aware of its existence.

Impact of the Charter

Staff felt that everything detailed in the FHE Charter was already in place in the college before its publication:

> *When the national charter was launched it was an add-on to what was already existing in the college.*

Staff did, however, acknowledge that the Charter had had an impact on a number of areas. While the college provided good information to students prior to the FHE Charter, it was felt that the Charter had made the provision of information more systematic and had encouraged the publication of more information about complaints:

> *The big impact was that it allowed us to formally publish the appeals system.*
>
> *The Charter has been a major stimulus to making it more systematic.*

The FHE Charter was seen to be in line with what the college was already doing, and fitted in well with other quality initiatives such as SQMS:

> *In the quality initiative of SQMS there's a very clear emphasis running through ... about how the customer is treated. The charter fits in very neatly with the demands of SQMS so we were motivated by more than just the charter.*

The enrolment procedures for the college had been reviewed and improved. This was seen to be a result of a number of factors: SQMS; SCOTVEC Audit; Investors

in People; and the FHE Charter.

Using information in the FHE Charter and SQMS the college had designed student surveys used to determine student satisfaction in a number of areas. These give feedback to teaching staff on their courses. One drawback of involvement in numerous quality initiatives was that it took up valuable time:

> *I'm producing so much evidence to show that we cover it all that in the end I actually have less time to spend on the individual students and I've become increasingly worried about that.*

Grievance procedures

If a student has a complaint relating to the course, they are encouraged to go to their tutor, lecturer or course co-ordinator in order to sort the problem out at a local level. This avoids complex and expensive procedures to deal with complaints which can be resolved locally. Students, however, also have the option of going to the student services unit who will try to solve their problem. If it is not possible to solve the problem there, students are given a complaints form to fill in. This is passed on to the assistant principal and to the relevant area of the college. The matter will then be investigated and the student will be contacted in writing with the decision. The assistant principal reports monthly to the strategic management team detailing the number and nature of complaints. Students are given information about complaints in their induction packs. They receive a one page diagram of how to go about complaining. Staff felt that the procedures were working, although the more formal complaints route was rarely used (at the time of interview they had not had a complaint for 2-3 months).

■ Institution C

Situated in an urban area, Institution C is a large FE college offering a diverse range of courses and flexible methods of studying. It has a number of specialist facilities and has a major commitment to users with special educational needs.

Availability and promotion of the FHE Charter

All staff had been distributed a copy of the FHE Charter when it had been published. Students were made aware of it via the standard publicity material such as posters, displays and summary leaflets. Copies of the Charter are available in the library and at all the information points.

The institutional charter

The college had produced a 'clients' charter' prior to the publication of the FHE Charter. It was produced because of the charter initiative; the college was aware that it would have to address the charter issue. In addition, the college was very much committed to customer care and wanted to set out its own standards:

> *It was recognised that we were in the business of providing a service and we wanted to go public in terms of the standards that we were going to set. So we published our standards and said this is what we will live up to.*

The clients' charter is a small booklet which 'offers clients of the college a statement of the quality of service they can expect from the college as a right' All students receive a copy of it as part of the college's comprehensive induction

programme. The clients' charter details the standards that clients can expect of the college including specific information such as response times to letters or telephone calls. It also describes the ways in which students can make both suggestions and complaints to the college. The college also produced a 'students' code of commitment' in conjunction with its charter. This sets out what the college expects of its students in return.

Staff felt the impact of their charter had been in terms of making clear to both staff and students the standards that were expected. It also showed the college's total commitment to customer care, and made the complaints procedure clear and accessible:

It's made the customer care side of things very much more prominent and more important. Customer Care seem to be worked off their feet all the time and that's really to keep up with the criteria in the clients' charter and to ensure that it's working effectively and efficiently.

As far as students are concerned I think the impact would be that they know quite clearly the standards that we have set and if they feel that they have been short-changed then there's a mechanism for them to do something about it.

Impact of the Charter

Staff at the college were keen to point out that the college was well down the road of providing all that the Charter states prior to its publication. The information the college provides is constantly reviewed and staff are very aware of the need to provide clear and comprehensive information. In addition the college's extensive procedures and policies are carefully monitored and up-dated. The Charter had, however, provided a useful checklist to ensure that all areas had been taken into account:

It's helped us to have confirmation that we are on the right lines.

There was a lot that was already going on and what the Charter perhaps did was to focus people in on what they were doing and make them be a little more structured about it and actually acknowledge that they were doing these things.

It is a handy checklist, it's a handy reinforcement of many of the issues which we have been alerted to over the last few years anyway.

While staff acknowledged the impact of the Charter, SQMS was seen to have had a greater impact on information, policies and procedures and was the main quality initiative that the college was working towards. SQMS and the Charter were, however, seen to complement each other and were viewed as working towards the same goals:

We have used this [SQMS] as the main driver, the main framework for quality developments within the college. There is nothing in the Charter which is out of step with SQMS. There is nothing in it that pushes us further than SQMS would do.

I think these initiatives [Charter, SQMS] have all come together ... they've made us reflect on what we are actually doing and see where we can actually improve the service.

Grievance procedures

The procedure by which students can complain is detailed in the clients' charter. Students are informed that if they have a problem they can report it directly to

their lecturer or class tutor. They also have the opportunity to complete complaints forms which are readily available at a number of sites in the college. These are then posted into complaints boxes which are emptied daily. As well as being given the opportunity to complain, students are encouraged to make suggestions to the college. Suggestions/comments forms are available to complete in the same way as the complaints forms.

The complaints forms go to the customer care manager who then decides how the complaint should proceed. The clients' charter states that complaints will be acknowledged within five working days of receipt and will be fully answered within 15 working days of receipt. The college also operates a formal appeals procedure, the details of which are publicised in the induction pack. The procedures described above were all in place prior to the publication of the FHE Charter.

While the grievance system was perceived to be working well, a number of the staff interviewed felt it was important to encourage students to tell their lecturer or course tutor of any grievance in the first instance. This means that problems which can easily be solved do not go through the 'bureaucratic mill':

> *It's [informal procedure] the best way. Very elaborate procedures can sometimes take a little time.*

While sorting out complaints locally seemed the ideal method in many cases, it was important to keep the formal complaints procedure for those instances when the informal approach was not appropriate, for example if a complaint concerned a lecturer or tutor.

Institution D

Institution D is a college of education situated in an urban area. The college offers a range of courses in teaching, social work and community education.

Availability and promotion of the FHE Charter

The Charter was not circulated to all students however those who did not receive a copy were told where they could get hold of one. All heads of department were made aware of the Charter at the Academic Board. Staff were also made aware of it at line committee meetings, however there was not a great response to it:

> *To date I don't think I've had a single request to see the Charter.*

The institutional charter

Institution D had not produced its own charter, because it was felt that the institution already provided all the charter-related information in its extensive handbooks, notes and course outlines:

> *Although we don't actually have a charter as such, we have various procedures and processes in place that are documented, that are relevant to the FHE Charter.*

Impact of the Charter

The Charter was not perceived to have had much of an impact on the college, although it was acknowledged as a useful checklist and had stimulated debate:

> *It hasn't had a great effect on the on-going policies that operate, most of them are covered, but it's served as an interesting checklist to see that we were doing a number of things.*

> *We had the provisions of the Charter in place. It caused us to debate as to whether what*

we actually had in place met the spirit and intention of the Charter.

The college is involved in a number of quality audits from the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) and from another higher education institution which validates some of its courses. These were seen to have more power and therefore have had more influence than the Charter although they were viewed as working towards the same goals. Student evaluation and feedback were also seen to be very important, and very influential on college life. They were thought to give students a feeling of empowerment:

I think it's letting students see that an institution is prepared to listen to them and take on board what they are saying.

Grievance procedures

Students were encouraged to go to their tutor or course director in the first instance if they felt they had a problem:

Basically ninety-nine times out of a hundred they'll get it sorted between them and the lecturer.

They can also raise issues with the student representatives on their course or can contact the Students' Representative Council for advice on how to complain. A formal academic appeals procedure exists. These various methods were viewed as working in practice:

I'm certainly not aware of many students feeling that they don't have an avenue of complaint.

The Charter had encouraged them to make sure that procedures were in place:

I think the Charter acted as a checklist and a stimulus to make sure that these provisions were not only available but not moribund. What it did was provide that stimulus to say we'd better just check that these are there, that they're known and properly documented.

Institution E

A former central institution, Institution E is a new university located in an urban area. The university offers a wide range of full-time, 'sandwich', part-time and short courses at postgraduate, first degree, diploma and certificate levels. It has strong links with industry.

Availability and promotion of the Charter

The summary leaflets were widely available to students and the document itself was available in the library, student services and the registry. It was not, however, promoted or publicised to any large degree.

The institutional charter

The university produced its own 'student charter' in response to the publication of the FHE Charter. It was also produced in order to summarise the information detailed in the national Charter as it was felt that it was a substantial document for students to read. In order to create their own charter, staff went through the FHE Charter in detail and picked out the areas they felt were relevant to the university. Their own student charter is a two-page document which sets out in general terms what students can expect from the university in relation to information, advice, teaching, services, facilities and complaints. It also explains

that the university subscribes fully to the contents and spirit of the Government's FHE Charter.

Included in the student charter is reference to what the university expects of its students in return. This perception of a 'two-way process' was viewed to be a very important addition:

> *In our charter not only do we subscribe to the national one but we also expect students to do certain things. That they will follow the regulations, be courteous and considerate and so on ... what I hoped was that by saying that a university expects something it would be a two-way process.*

The student charter had been made available to students during their enrolment procedure, however, at the time of the interviews it had been in place for less than a term. It was therefore hard to assess its impact, although staff were not expecting it to have much of an effect.

Impact of the Charter

The Charter was viewed as being part of a number of other changes, quality initiatives and review procedures that were on-going in the university. For example, a change to modular courses had had a big impact on the information provided to students. One area in which the Charter was seen to have had an impact was in relation to student loans. The Charter states that students should be seen by their institution within 14 days of a request for a loan; this had not been happening. The issue was now being addressed.

While not having had a large impact, the Charter was seen to have made staff more aware of quality issues:

> *It's just generally heightened awareness of things that we were probably doing fairly well already or that we were just about to do but it's brought them forward.*

The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) and quality initiatives, such as SQMS, were viewed as having more impact on information, policies and procedures. The Charter was seen largely as a publicity exercise, highlighting the importance of quality. One staff member had reservations about the lack of funding supporting the Charter initiative:

> *Charters do serve a purpose in setting out certain standards that need to be met and I think that's reasonable but it would be more reasonable if resourcing were provided to ensure that these standards were met without turmoil.*

Grievance procedures

If a student has a complaint there are a range of options open to them. They could seek the advice of their course leader, year tutor or personal tutor. Each course has a course committee which includes two student representatives. It would be possible for the student representatives to introduce complaints at meetings. All of the courses have evaluation forms which students complete allowing them to comment on the organisation of their course and on the teaching of individual classes. There also exists a formal complaints and appeals procedure.

Staff did not think that the Charter had affected the grievance procedures in operation in the university. It might, however, have given students increasing confidence to make a complaint. The procedures were seen to be working well, and students were made aware of what they should do if they wished to make their views known.

■ Institution F

An old and established university, Institution F offers a range of postgraduate and undergraduate courses in both traditional and modern subjects. The university is also a centre for research work in many areas.

Availability and promotion of the Charter

The Charter was made available to all staff and was introduced at committee meetings. It was promoted at various outlets in the university but was not given out to students. It was widely publicised on notice boards.

The institutional charter

The university produced its own 'student charter', a document a few pages long, in the spring of 1994 in response to the publication of the FHE Charter. There was some resistance to its production, with a feeling that it might be 'stating the obvious'. Staff also felt that they were already providing all the information referred to in the FHE Charter through their numerous documents, student guides and handbooks. Instead of duplicating this information, their student charter was designed to be a guide to the services provided by the university, including details of where in the university literature information relating to the services could be found:

> *It did seem to be an opportunity to bring together a lot of the information that comes to students in such a wide variety of ways that it's difficult to assimilate.*

The services described range from child-care facilities to quality assurance procedures. The student charter also contains information about how students can make their views known if they are not satisfied, and where to find information about how to lodge an academic appeal.

The student charter was not distributed to every student but was, however, made available at enrolment and was publicised on notice-boards and through subject departments. It was viewed as having little impact, other than being one of a number of things which was changing the climate in which the university functions:

> *I think, other than continuing to change perceptions, that is that the university is answerable to students and also to staff, then there has been no impact.*

Impact of the Charter

The FHE charter was viewed as part of the change that was occurring in education, and more generally in other public sectors:

> *The idea that publicly funded institutions are offering a service is a complete change of ethos. I think the charter is part of that change and not the cause of the change.*

Staff felt that the FHE Charter had had little impact on procedures and services as these were in place prior to its publication. External teaching reviews and quality audits were viewed as having a much more powerful impact on the university. In addition the course evaluation forms which students are invited to complete were viewed as an important tool:

> *I think these [evaluation forms] have an enormous impact and quite rightly so.*

Grievance procedures

Many procedures exist by which students can make their views known. They are encouraged to begin by making a complaint to the person in charge of the particular area concerned. For example, all complaints related to academic areas should be addressed to the course co-ordinator or head of department. If informal approaches to complaints are not satisfactory, students can contact the Students' Representative Council who will advise them how best to make their views known. Specific formal procedures exist for dealing with racial discrimination, sexual harassment and academic appeals. Students are also invited to make their views known when they complete course evaluation forms.

Staff felt that these procedures worked adequately. They encouraged the informal approach to complaints which they felt was the best method of resolving problems. The procedures themselves had not been affected by the Charter, although their own student charter did highlight how students should go about complaining.

■ Perceptions of the Charter document

There was a widespread feeling in all these institutions that the Charter contained relevant information and addressed appropriate issues. It gave institutions a 'pointer' and documented good practice. Combined with this, however, was a feeling that the Charter touched on very general issues and was really reporting 'common sense':

> *They're obvious. What else would you say about the services? But then again they're quite vague.*

> *The Charter is a very general document. It covers such a huge range of things in general.*

A number of senior staff commented that the Charter's contents were vague and non-specific, which reduced its power and therefore its impact:

> *If you were ever into a case where the charter was being argued and you started to query the words then the charter wouldn't stand up to any of that, it's open to too many varying interpretations.*

While there were repeated assertions in all of the institutions that the Charter merely covered areas which were already dealt with, there were also repeated comments that it had served as a useful checklist of issues. It appears to have had a common, if not always openly acknowledged, role in systematising information and procedures within these institutions.

7 The Views of Teaching Staff

In determining the impact of the Further and Higher Education Charter on practice within FHE institutions, the views of teaching staff were an important source of data. It was of particular interest to the research to discover whether teaching staff felt that their work, or indeed the institution itself, had been affected by the publication of the Charter.

The questions asked of teaching staff sought data on:

- awareness of and familiarity with the Charter
- provision of information to students
- knowledge of grievance procedures
- perception of the Charter's impact on their work and the institution.

The sample

A sample of teaching staff in all of the example institutions visited were contacted and asked to complete a questionnaire. The number of questionnaires distributed, and the proportion returned from each are shown in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Responses to the survey of teaching staff

Case study	Sector	Questionnaires sent out	Questionnaires returned	Response rate
A	FE	55*	37	67%
B	FE	100	43	43%
C	FE	100	66	66%
D	HE	100	49	49%
E	HE	100	62	62%
F	HE	100	52	52%
	Total	555	309	56%

Note: *This represents all teaching staff in Institution A at the time of the survey.*

The questionnaires were distributed to staff across a range of subject departments. Tables 7.2 and 7.3 illustrate the status of staff and the subject areas that they teach. The subject areas were taken from SCOTVEC's 'superclass subclasses' classification model which is used to categorise their National Certificate Modules. Seventy percent of the sample were male.

Table 7.2: Status of teaching staff

Status	FE (N=146) %	HE (N=160) %
Lecturer	32	61
Senior lecturer, team/ course leader	46	21
Head of dept/ section leader	19	5
Professor	0	6
Other	3	8

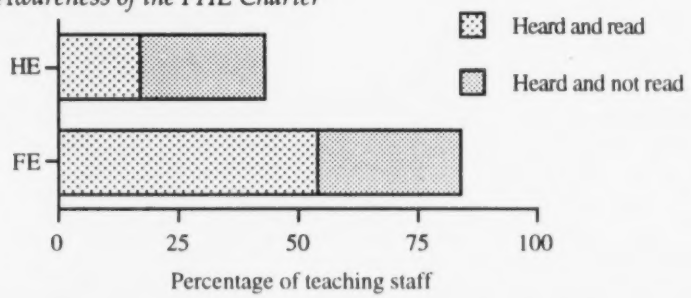
Table 7.3: Subject areas taught by teaching staff

Subject area	FE (N=143) %	HE (N=159) %
Science, maths	9	29
Culture, society and education	10	18
Business and management	12	12
Agriculture, horticulture and animal care	18	4
Computers, electronic and electrical engineering	8	9
Languages, communication and self-help	9	7
Engineering production and industrial design	9	5
Other	25	16

■ Awareness of the FHE Charter

Staff were asked whether they had heard of the FHE Charter and if so, how familiar they were with its contents. Figure 7.1 illustrates those staff who had heard of the Charter but not read any of it, and those staff who had both heard of it and read some of it. Teaching staff in FE were more likely than those in HE to have both heard of and read the FHE Charter. Overall, the majority of teaching staff in FE (84%) had heard of the Charter, however only a minority of HE staff (43%) were aware of its existence.

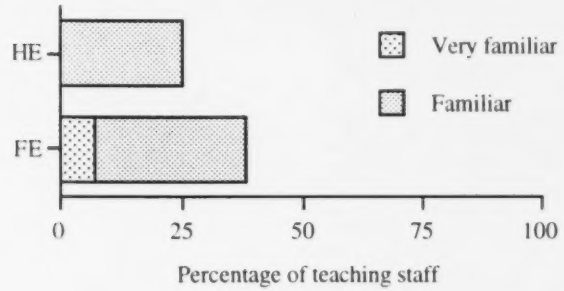
Figure 7.1: Awareness of the FHE Charter



Of those staff who had heard of the Charter, most (79%) had first heard of it through their college or university. Of those who had read it, the most popular source for obtaining a copy was again the college or university.

Less than half of those who had heard of the Charter felt familiar with its contents, with FE staff significantly more familiar with it than HE staff (Figure 7.2). Of the total sample only 11% of HE staff and 32% of FE staff were confident enough to say they felt familiar with the contents of the FHE Charter.

Figure 7.2: Familiarity with the contents amongst those who had heard of the Charter

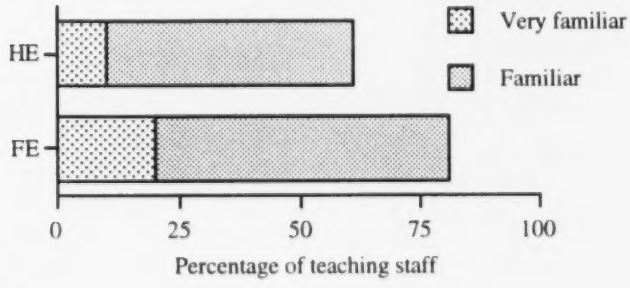


Institutional charters

Five out of the six institutions had their own institutional charters in place at the time of the survey. These were all single documents referred to using the term 'charter'. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Example D (an HE institution) claimed to have a charter, however it was not referred to as such. Instead it represented the collection of documents which the institution provides to students which include charter-related information.

Teaching staff were asked whether they were aware that their institution had its own charter and if so how familiar they felt with it. The responses from Example D have been removed from the analysis to avoid confusion. Eighty one percent of FE staff and 52% of HE staff were aware that their institution had its own charter. Of those who were aware that their institution had a charter, the majority felt familiar with its contents (Figure 7.3). Again, staff in further education were more likely to be familiar with their charters than were staff in higher education.

Figure 7.3: Familiarity with the contents of the institutional charter amongst those who were aware of it



It would appear that staff are more familiar with the contents of their own charters than they are with the contents of the Further and Higher Education Charter for Scotland.

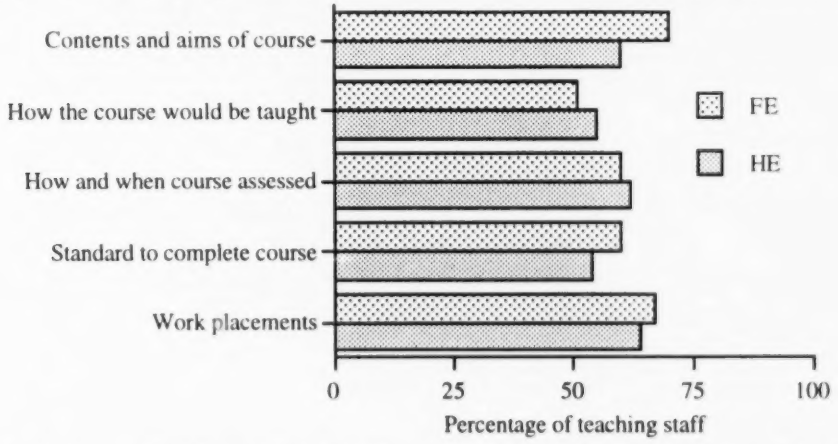
Provision of information to students

The charter states that students should have access to the following information:

- the aims and content of their course
- the methods that will be used to teach the course
- how and when the course will be assessed
- the standard that they must reach to complete each part of the course
- any work placements they need to do as part of the course.

The questionnaire sought data on whether staff provide the above information to the students that they teach, and if so the methods by which they do so. Most staff said that they provided the information to students both orally and in written form (Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4: Staff who provided information to their students both orally and in writing



A minority of staff provided the information orally, but not in writing, or in writing, but not orally (Figures 7.5 and 7.6). FE staff were more likely to provide information orally whereas HE staff tended to provide it in written form. This perhaps reflects some of the differences between FE and HE. FE colleges tend to have smaller class sizes and therefore it may be more easy and effective to convey information orally.

Figure 7.5: Staff providing information orally, but not in writing

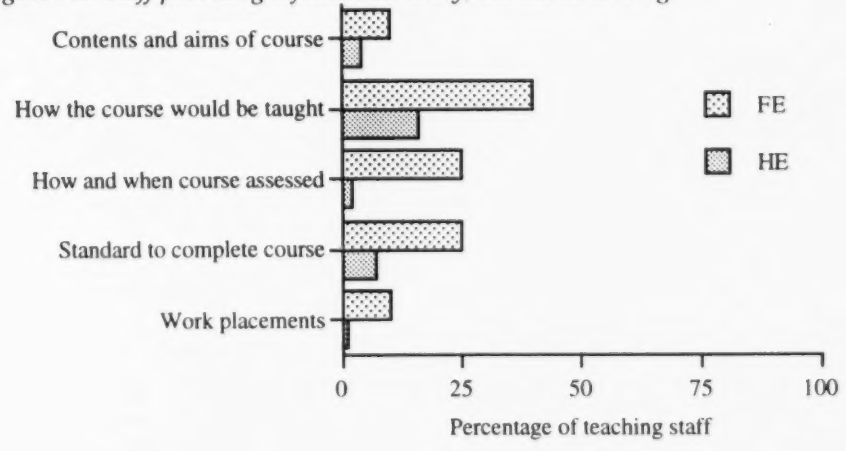
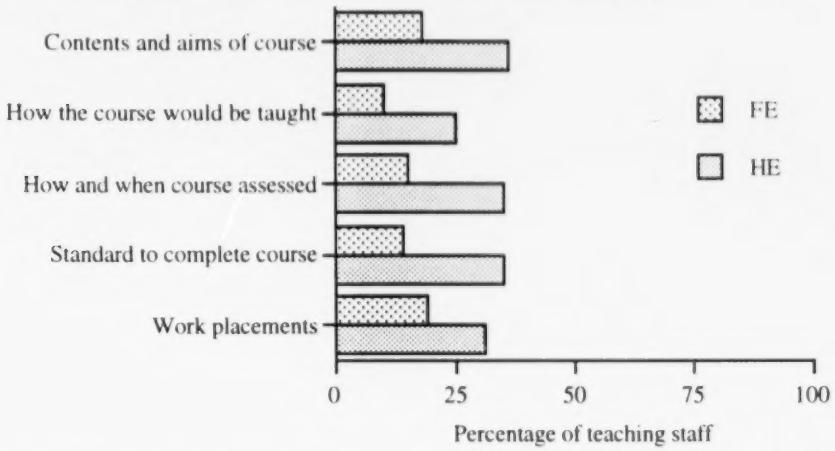


Figure 7.6: Staff providing information in writing, but not orally

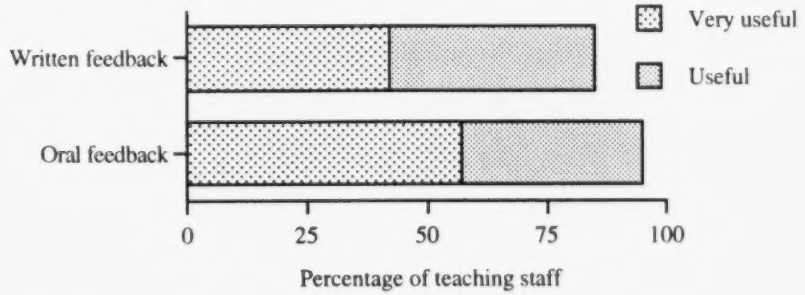


Making views known

Constructive comments and criticism from users can help colleges and universities to improve the services they provide. By making their views known students can make a major contribution to maintaining and enhancing standards. The teaching staff in the sample were asked about the opportunities they provide to students to comment on their courses. Also of interest to the research were the grievance procedures that are in place in institutions, and the extent to which they are working in practice.

Nearly all staff gave students the opportunity to comment about their courses both orally and in writing. Feedback, in particular oral feedback, was perceived as useful by the majority of staff (Figure 7.7).

Figure 7.7: Usefulness of student feedback

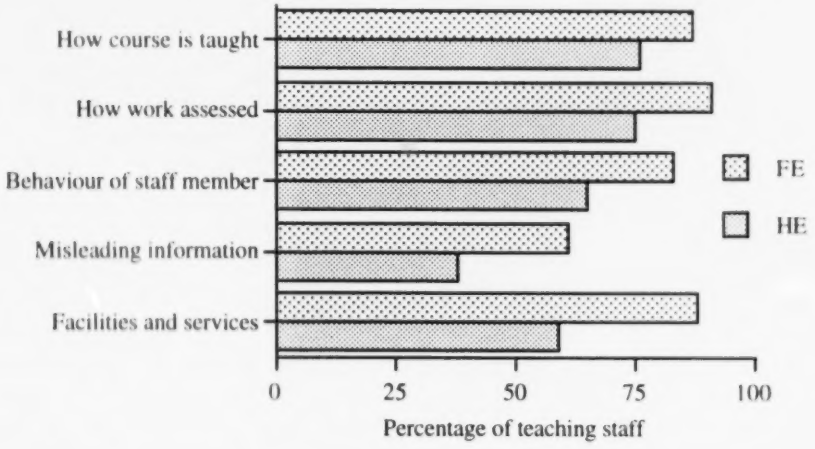


The questionnaire to staff asked whether they felt that their institution had a clear policy on how they should handle a number of different types of complaint from students. These were complaints about:

- how a course is being taught
- how a piece of work has been assessed
- the behaviour of a member of staff
- misleading information given by the institution
- the facilities and services provided by the institution.

In all areas except misleading information, the majority of both FE and HE staff felt that their institution had a clear policy on how to deal with complaints (Figure 7.8). Staff at FE colleges were significantly more likely to agree that they had a clear policy for all of the areas of complaint excluding those related to how courses are taught.

Figure 7.8: Staff who feel their institution has a clear policy on complaints



Perceptions of the impact of the FHE Charter

The questionnaire asked staff to state to what extent they felt that the institution and their own work had been affected by the publication of the FHE Charter. Space was given on the questionnaire for staff to describe in their own words what they felt the positive and negative effects had been. Figures 7.9 and 7.10 illustrate the percentage of the total sample who felt that the FHE Charter had affected the institution and their own work.

Staff in HE were much less likely than those in FE to say that the FHE Charter had affected either their institution or their own work. This partly reflects the different levels of awareness of the Charter amongst the two groups, however, even amongst those who had heard of the Charter those from FE were significantly more likely to feel it had had an impact.

Figure 7.9: Staff perception of the extent of the effect of the FHE Charter on their institution

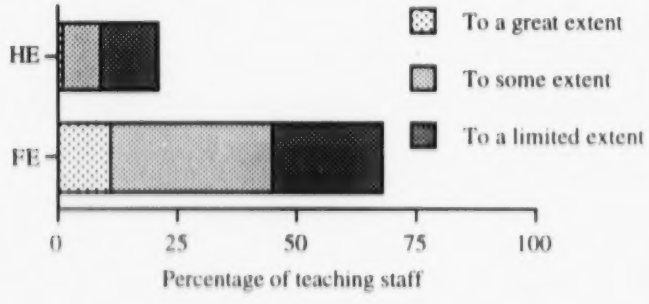
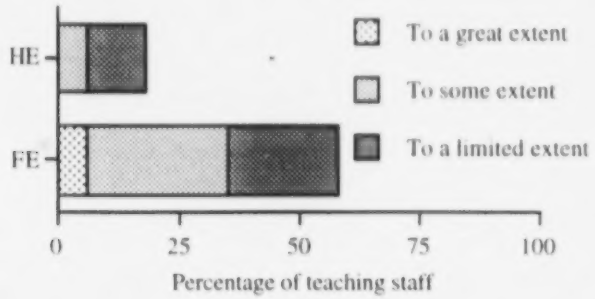


Figure 7.10: Staff perception of the extent of the effect of the FHE Charter on their own work



There is a link between familiarity with the contents of the Charter and perception of its impact. Further analysis of the data revealed that staff who felt most familiar with the contents of the Charter were those most likely to say that it had affected both the institution and their own work.

When asked to describe in their own words the effect of the Charter on the institution or their work, a number of staff chose to comment. These findings are illustrated in Tables 7.4 and 7.5.

Table 7.4: Staff perceptions of the effect of the Charter on the institution

	FE staff	HE staff
Greater awareness of students as customers	14	3
Formalised procedures	11	3
Raised awareness of quality issues	8	3
Increased paperwork and administration	8	3
Acts as a checklist - confirms areas are provided	8	3

Seventeen staff felt that the Charter had made their institution more aware of its students as customers:

> *People are more aware of students as people and customers.*
>
> *A general improvement of attitude - the student is customer and matters.*

Fourteen staff commented that the Charter had encouraged the institution to formalise its procedures:

> *The Charter has had the positive effect of providing an incentive to the college to pull together in a more formalised way the various services and facilities available.*
>
> *It has caused us to formalise some arrangements which had already been in practice on an informal basis.*

Comments from staff in relation to the effect of the Charter on their own work were more negative. This is shown in table 7.5.

Table 7.5: *Staff perceptions of the effect of the Charter on their own work*

	FE staff	HE staff
Increased paperwork and administration	14	3
Reduced time available for other areas	11	3
Improved information to students	8	3
Greater awareness of students as customers	8	3
Increased workload	8	3

The most frequent comments related to an increase in administration or workload, leading to reduced time available for work on other areas:

> *Considerably more of my time is taken up with 'quality issues' admin at the expense of academic concerns.*

> *Waste a lot of time recording every procedure and passing round bits of paper which then have to be filed.*

> *Teaching/students seem to come second to admin.*

One staff member felt that it had had a positive effect, but the increase in paperwork detracted from this:

> *It has made us more aware of our responsibilities and provided us with a clear set of guidelines to follow. However the bureaucracy which accompanies this initiative is disabling and therefore can be counter-productive.*

Among the positive comments, were those staff who felt that the Charter had improved the information made available to students:

> *Made me more aware of the need to give students accurate written information in an accessible form.*

> *More care and time taken explaining to students information on course content, assessment procedures etc.*

8 The Student Experience

Colleges and universities claimed to be treating their students more as customers or clients, entitled to a high standard of service. It was therefore of central importance to the research to survey the views of students in order to determine whether their experience matched up with their expectations in relation to the main areas covered by the FHE Charter. Also of interest was whether they had heard of, or read, the Charter.

The questions asked of students related to:

- the information they had received about their course, services, facilities, policies and procedures
- their satisfaction with the information they had received
- their satisfaction with services and facilities they had used
- complaints procedures
- awareness of the FHE Charter
- awareness of institutional charters.

The sample

During visits to the example institutions researchers conducted a total of 600 face-to-face structured interviews with students. One hundred were conducted in each institution visited.

Among the HE students included in the sample were twelve post-graduate students. Of these, nine were studying a taught course. The majority of the questions asked were relevant to both undergraduates and post-graduates. Where questions were not relevant to the post-graduates interviewed, the questions were omitted.

Fifty nine percent of the students interviewed were female. This was partly due to the fact that one of the example institutions was a college of education where the majority of students at the college were female. In that college 86% of the students interviewed were female. The sample also reflects current trends in education. In the session 1992-93, 53% of the HE student population was female.

The students represented in the data were studying a variety of subject areas for a number of different qualifications. These are shown in Tables 8.1 and 8.2. Like those detailed in the teaching staff data, the subject areas were taken from SCOTVEC's 'superclass subclasses' classification model. Over half (55%) of the students from FE colleges were on courses of one year or less, however the majority (85%) of HE students were on courses lasting more than three years. The year groups of those students on courses longer than one year are shown in Figure 8.1. Nearly all the students surveyed in HE institutions were studying full-time compared to 78% of those at FE colleges.

Table 8.1: Subject areas studied by students

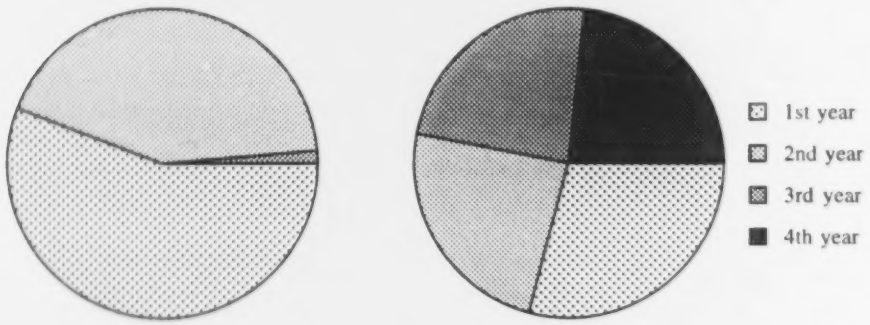
Subject area	FE (N=300) %	HE (N=300) %
Culture, society and education	10	36
Business and management	24	17
Languages, communication and self-help	13	4
Agriculture, horticulture and animal care	12	3
Science and maths	4	11
Health and personal care	9	7
Computers, electronic and electrical engineering	6	8
Food, catering, leisure and tourism	7	0
Other	15	14

Table 8.2: Qualifications studied for by students

FE qualifications studied for	FE students (N=300) %
NC	23
HNC/HND	38
SVQ	9
Highers/A-levels	9
Other	14

HE qualifications studied for	HE students (N=300) %
MA/BA	35
BEd	29
BSc	23
BEng	3
Other	10

Figure 8.1: The proportion of students on courses longer than one year studying in different year groups



The provision of information

The FHE Charter states that students should have access to factual information and advice. They should receive information telling them about their course, the facilities and services available in the institution and the policies and procedures in operation. The questions asked of students were designed to determine whether students had received information relating to these areas, and if not whether they would have liked to have been given it.

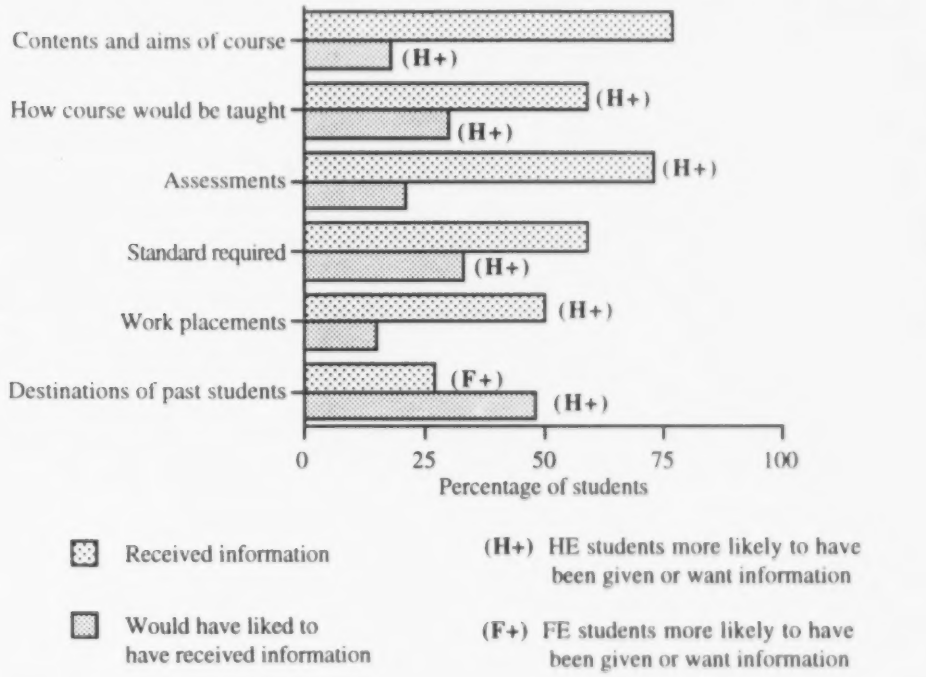
Information about courses

The Charter states that students should receive information on:

- the contents and aims of the course
- how the course would be taught
- how and when the course would be assessed
- the standard they would have to reach to complete each part of the course
- information on work placements, where applicable
- the destinations of previous students who had completed the course.

Figure 8.2 illustrates those students who claimed to have been given the above information and those who would have liked to have received it. In addition, it shows statistical differences between the responses of FE and HE students. Most students had received information on the contents and aims of their course, how the course would be taught, how and when the course would be assessed, and the standard required to complete the course. Only one quarter of students had received information on the destinations of previous students; nearly half would have liked such information.

Figure 8.2: Information received by students relating to their course



Information about services and facilities

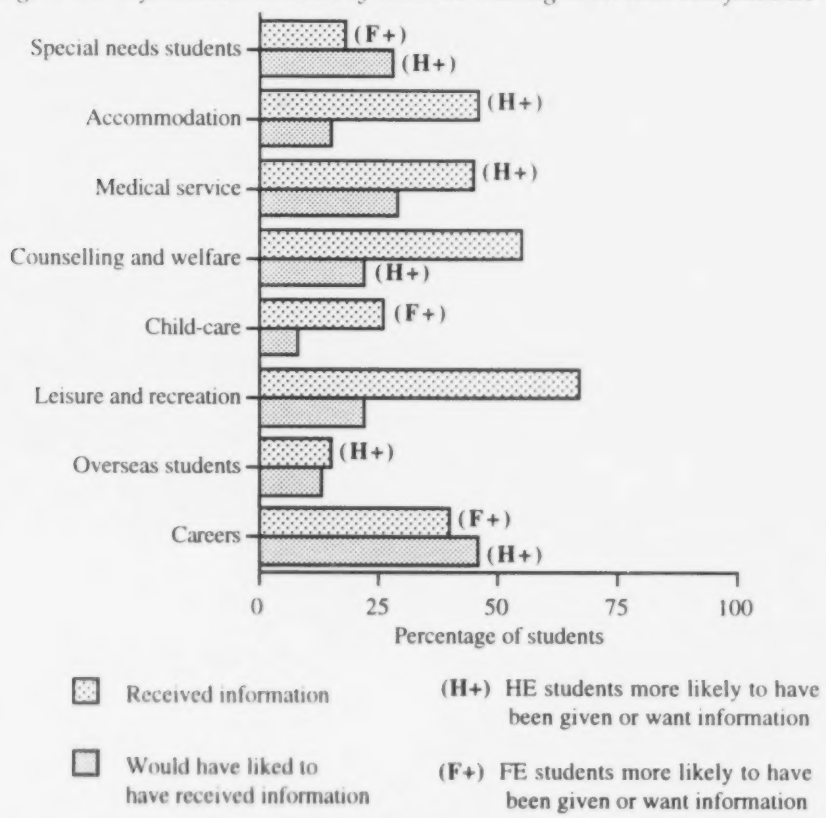
The FHE Charter states that students should receive information on:

- facilities available for students with disabilities or learning difficulties
- accommodation available for students
- the medical service
- the counselling and welfare service

- child-care facilities
- leisure and recreation facilities
- services or facilities provided for overseas students
- the careers service.

Only a minority of students claimed to have received the above information, except in relation to leisure and recreation facilities and counselling and welfare services where most had been given some information (Figure 8.3).

Figure 8.3: Information received by students relating to services and facilities



Although many students had not received information relating to these areas, often it was not relevant to the individual respondent, for example in relation to child-care facilities or facilities for students with disabilities or learning difficulties. Those students who said that they would have liked information relating to these facilities did not necessarily want it for their own use. Instead, they felt they should be aware of these facilities in order to be able to advise others.

One area, however, needs to be addressed. Nearly half of the students said that they would have liked to have received information about the careers service. The Market Research Study found that a careers and job information service is perceived as the most important non-academic service an institution can offer. Given its importance, more emphasis should be placed on informing students of the services available.

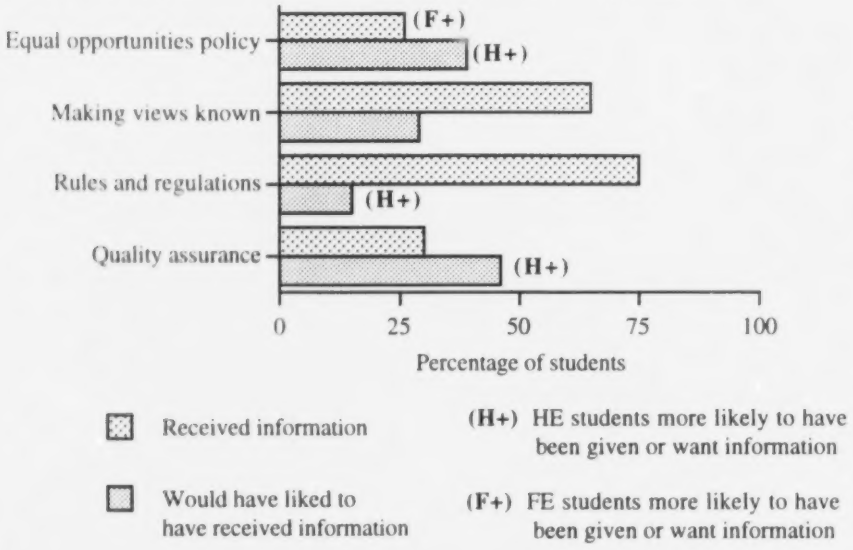
Information about policies and procedures

The FHE Charter states that students should have access to information on:

- the institution's equal opportunities policy
- how to make their views known if they are not happy with the services or information provided by the institution
- the institution's rules, regulations and disciplinary procedures
- the steps taken by the institution to assure the quality of its teaching and services.

Most students had been given information explaining how to make their views known and detailing the rules, regulations and disciplinary procedures in operation (Figure 8.4).

Figure 8.4: Information received relating to policies and procedures



Statistical differences in the provision of information

There were a number of statistical differences between the provision of information to FE and HE students. These are illustrated in Table 8.3.

Table 8.3: Statistical differences in the provision of information to FE and HE students

HE students were more likely to have received information on:	FE students were more likely to have received information on:
– how their course would be taught	– the destinations of previous students
– how and when the course would be assessed	– facilities for students with disabilities or learning difficulties
– work placements	– child-care facilities
– accommodation available	– careers service
– the medical service	– equal opportunities policy.
– services or facilities for overseas students.	

It would appear that HE students have received more information relating to their course. Interestingly, FE students claimed to have been given more

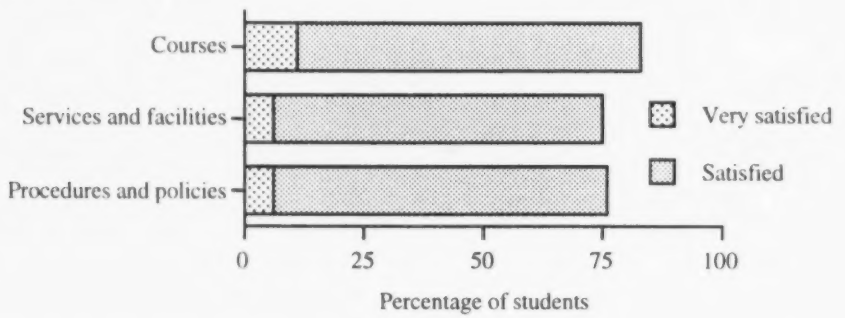
information relating to the destinations of previous students and the careers service. FE courses tend to be short (one or two years) and it may be that vocational information is more relevant to FE students as they will be considering their next steps almost on arrival at college. Further analysis of the data revealed that those HE students in their third or fourth year were significantly more likely than those in their first or second year to have received information relating to careers.

Where HE students had not been given information relating to a specific area they were more likely than FE students to say that they would have liked to have received it for over half of the areas mentioned.

Satisfaction with information received

Students were asked to what extent they felt satisfied with the information provided in relation to the three main categories discussed; their course; services and facilities; and procedures and policies. Despite many students not having received information included in these categories, the majority were satisfied with what they had been given (Figure 8.5).

Figure 8.5: Student satisfaction with the information they had received



They were also asked whether the information that they had received had been accurate. The majority said that it had in relation to the above three areas.

Making views known

The Charter explains that all institutions should have internal complaints procedures or systems, and these should be published to students. Interviews with senior staff in the example institutions revealed that most staff would prefer it if complaints were sorted out at a local level without need to use the often bureaucratic formal complaints procedures. They preferred students to seek the advice of their lecturers, tutors or course leaders; in other words, someone in the department in which they were studying. Only if this process proved unsatisfactory did they feel it would be necessary to use a more formal approach. Two of the institutions in the study provided complaints forms that students could complete and five of the institutions regularly surveyed the views of students using feedback questionnaires or course evaluation forms.

It was of interest to the research to discover what students felt they would do if they were not happy with different aspects of their education. Hypothetical

questions were asked relating to what they might do if they wished to complain about:

- the way their course was being taught
- the way their work was being assessed
- the way a member of staff was behaving
- misleading information supplied by the institution
- the services and facilities in the institution.

The responses to these questions were unprompted by the researchers. The majority of student responses fell into five different categories. Students claimed that if they wished to complain they would contact:

- a member of the teaching staff (lecturer, tutor)
- a senior member of the teaching staff (course/team leader, head of department)
- the relevant person concerned
- their class rep or a member of the Students' Representative Council (SRC).

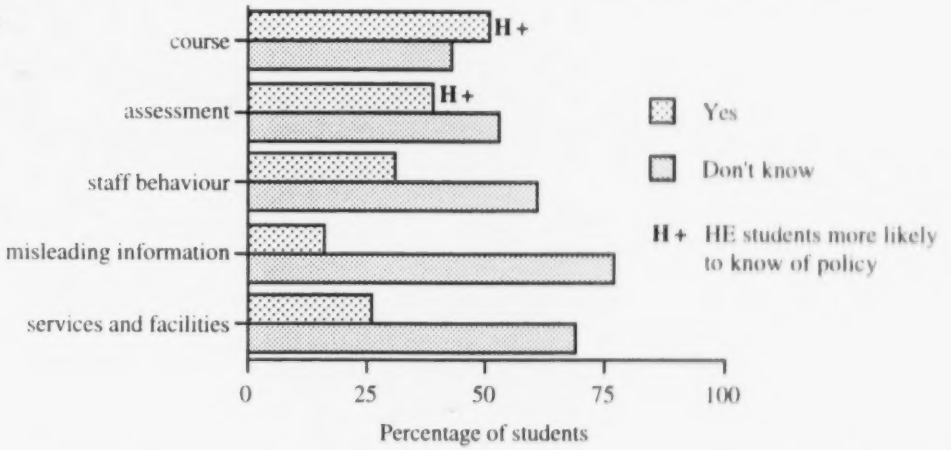
A number of students also said that they would do nothing or were unsure what they would do. Only a handful of students mentioned the complaints forms or feedback questionnaires that were used in a number of institutions. The percentage responses of students to the five main categories described above are illustrated in Table 8.4.

Table 8.4: *Student responses routes to different types of complaint*

	Students would complain to ...				
Complaints about...	Teaching staff %	Senior teaching staff %	Relevant person %	Class rep/ SRC member %	Do nothing/ don't know %
the course	30	30	0	20	6
assessment	55	22	7	2	7
staff behaviour	19	36	15	6	10
misleading information	13	19	8	11	34
services and facilities	7	14	7	30	28

Students were also asked whether their institution had a policy or procedure for dealing with the different types of complaints. Despite most students claiming to have received information relating to making their views known (Figure 8.4, page 46), many were unsure if there existed a policy or procedure for dealing with different types of complaint (Figure 8.6). HE students were more likely to be aware of a policy or procedure for complaints in relation to their course and assessment procedures. This mirrors the findings from the Market Research Study where HE students were more likely to be aware of the complaints procedures in their place of study.

Figure 8.6: Does the institution have a policy or procedure to deal with complaints?



It is worth noting that despite many students being unaware if their institution had a complaints procedure for the areas discussed, the majority claimed that they would do something if they felt unhappy. In relation to complaints about their course, assessment or staff behaviour, the majority of students said that they would go directly to see a member of the teaching staff. Interestingly, this is what staff in their institutions would want them to do if they had a problem.

For complaints about misleading information provided by the college or university, one third of the students in the sample said that they would do nothing or that they were unsure what they would do. Similarly, 28% would not complain or did not know how to go about complaining about services or facilities. It would appear that students are less sure of how to make their views known in relation to non-teaching matters.

During the interview, students were asked if they had ever made a complaint to their institution. Twenty eight per cent said that they had. We have no information on what these complaints were about, or how serious they were. However, those who had made a complaint were then asked whether they felt that it had been dealt with efficiently, fairly and thoroughly. There would appear to be some dissatisfaction with regard to the processing of complaints; while half were satisfied with the fairness of how they were treated, similar numbers said that it had *not* been dealt with efficiently (14% of the total sample) or thoroughly (16% of the total sample).

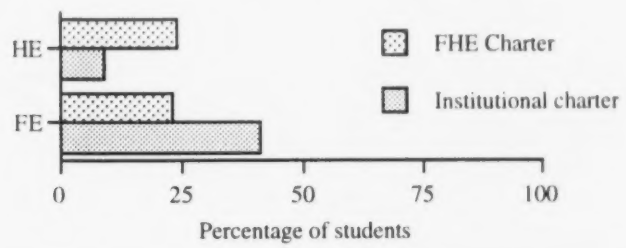
Awareness of the Charter

Students were asked whether they had heard of the FHE Charter and if so whether they had read any of it. The interview situation allowed researchers to ask students if they could name any of the areas covered in the Charter without prompting as to what these areas might be. Twenty four percent of the students interviewed had heard of the Charter and 25% of those had read some of it. In total, therefore, only 6% of the sample had read any of the FHE Charter. There were no differences between the responses of those students in FE and HE in relation to awareness of the FHE Charter (Figure 8.7).

Although one quarter of students had heard of the Charter, very few were aware of the type of information it contained. When asked whether they could name any of the areas covered in the Charter only a handful of students felt able to respond. Twelve students (2%) mentioned that it related to standards of service and six students said that it contained information on financial support.

Students were also asked whether they knew if their college or university had its own institutional charter. As well as showing student awareness of the national Charter, Figure 8.7 illustrates that FE students were much more likely to be aware of their own charter than were HE students (responses from Example D where they did not have a named charter were omitted from the analysis of the data relating to institutional charters). Only 8% of HE students knew that their institution had a charter compared to 41% of FE students. Most (80%) FE students who were aware of their own charter knew that they could have access to a copy if they wished.

Figure 8.7: Awareness of the FHE Charter and institutional charters among students



HE students were more likely to have heard of the national Charter than their institutional charter whereas FE students were more likely to have heard of their own charter. It would appear that FE colleges have marketed and promoted their own charters much more strongly and successfully than HE institutions. The FE charters were also more established. While the HE charters had been in place for less than a year, two of the FE charters had been produced before the publication of the FHE Charter (i.e. more than one full academic session before the survey took place).

The educational experience

In the final section of the interview students were asked the extent to which they agreed with a number of statements. These covered general areas of their educational experience and were taken from the Charter's 'Framework for Standards'. The statements, and the proportion of students agreeing with each one, are illustrated in Table 8.5.

For the majority of students, experience of further and higher education lives up to the standards detailed in the FHE Charter. Particularly encouraging is the finding that 86% of students were satisfied with the quality of education they were receiving, although only 12% claimed to be very satisfied. This reflects the positive findings reported in the Market Research Study where the vast majority of students felt satisfied with the college or university which they had attended.

Table 8.5: Student agreement with statements relating to their education

	Agree strongly %	Agree %	*Total %*
Students have the opportunity to express their views on the quality of teaching and other services	11	68	*79*
The institution is doing as much as it can to promote equal opportunities [1]	6	50	*56%*
It is easy to make an appointment with a member of staff to talk about the course or matters related to it	20	58	*78*
There is a high standard of teaching at this institution	8	67	*75*
When my work is assessed, I usually get it back quickly [1]	10	53	*63*
My grant/bursary is usually paid promptly[2]	22	65	*87*
My loan is usually paid promptly[2]	11	51	*62*
Overall I am satisfied with the quality of education I am getting at this institution	12	74	*86*

Notes:

1. FE students were more likely to agree with the statement.

2. The figures for those students for which these statements were irrelevant have been omitted from the analysis.

9 Local Employers' Views of the Charter

Each of the three FE colleges in the study was asked to provide the names and addresses of a number of employers with whom the college had links. The employer might be using the college for training staff, regularly recruiting employees from the college or using college consultancy or other services. It was of interest to the research to discover what sort of information the colleges were providing to these employers, whether employers were aware of how to make their views known to the college and also whether they were aware of the FHE Charter and the institution's own charter.

The sample

A total of 59 employers were contacted and asked to participate in a telephone interview. A total of 36 completed interviews were conducted. The employers interviewed tended to be smaller than those contacted in the survey of large, national employers. Almost half (49%) employed less than 100 people. Only one third (34%) had more than 500 employees. All the organisations were based in Scotland. Table 9.1 details the types of work they carried out.

Table 9.1: Employers' type of work

Type of work	%
Manufacturing industry	28
Public services	17
Construction/engineering	11
Agriculture	11
Government	8
Other	25

Involvement with the institution

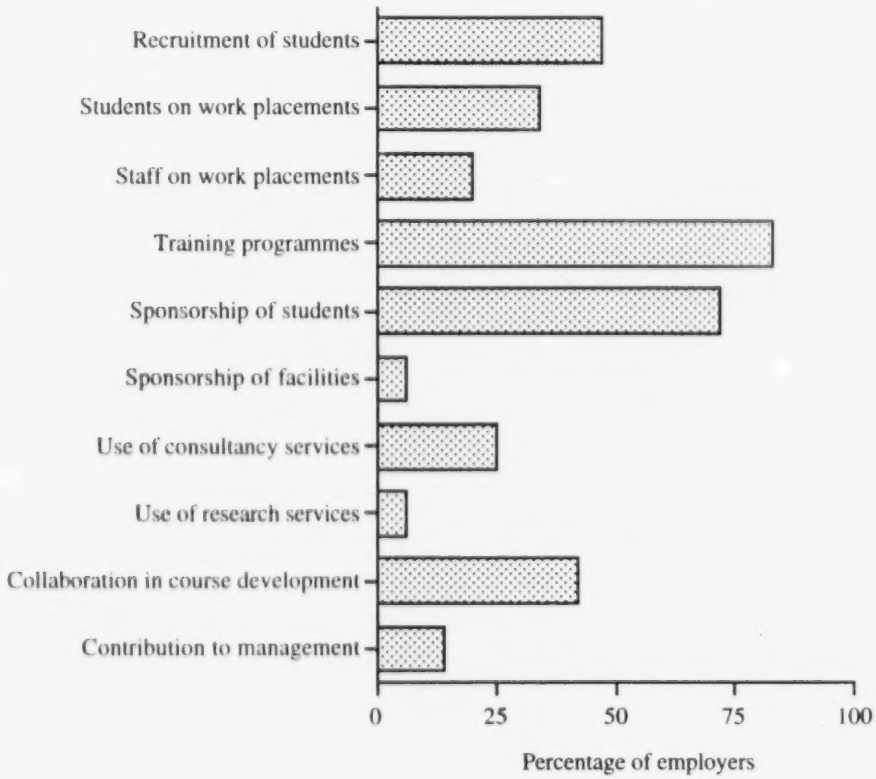
Employers were asked about the nature of their involvement with the institution with whom they had links. They were asked if they were involved with the college in any of the following ways:

- recruitment of students who had completed their courses
- students involved in work placements at the organisation
- college staff involved in work placements at organisation
- use of training programmes for employees
- sponsorship of students
- sponsorship of facilities
- use of consultancy services

- use of college's research services
- collaboration with college in course development
- contribution to overall management (eg representation on college governing body).

Figure 9.1 shows the proportions of employers involved in each of these activities. Most of the employers (83%) were using the college to provide training programmes for their staff. Almost three quarters (72%) were sponsoring students at the college. About half (47%) were recruiting students from the college on completion of their courses.

Figure 9.1: Employer involvement with institutions



These results do not reflect the findings from the survey of large, national employers. The larger national employers were more likely to be involved with FE colleges through the recruitment of students and through the provision of work placements for students still at college and less likely to be using training programmes or sponsoring students.

■ Awareness of the Charter

Employers were asked about their awareness of the FHE Charter. Thirty one percent of the sample had heard of the FHE Charter and most of these had also read at least some of it. Only one employer, however, could name any of the areas covered by it.

Institutional charter

Employers were asked whether the institution that they were involved with had its own charter. Again, 31% were aware that it did and about half (54%) of these had read some of it. Although the percentage is identical it does not reflect the same group who had heard of the FHE Charter. Only one employer could accurately name any of the areas covered in the institution's charter.

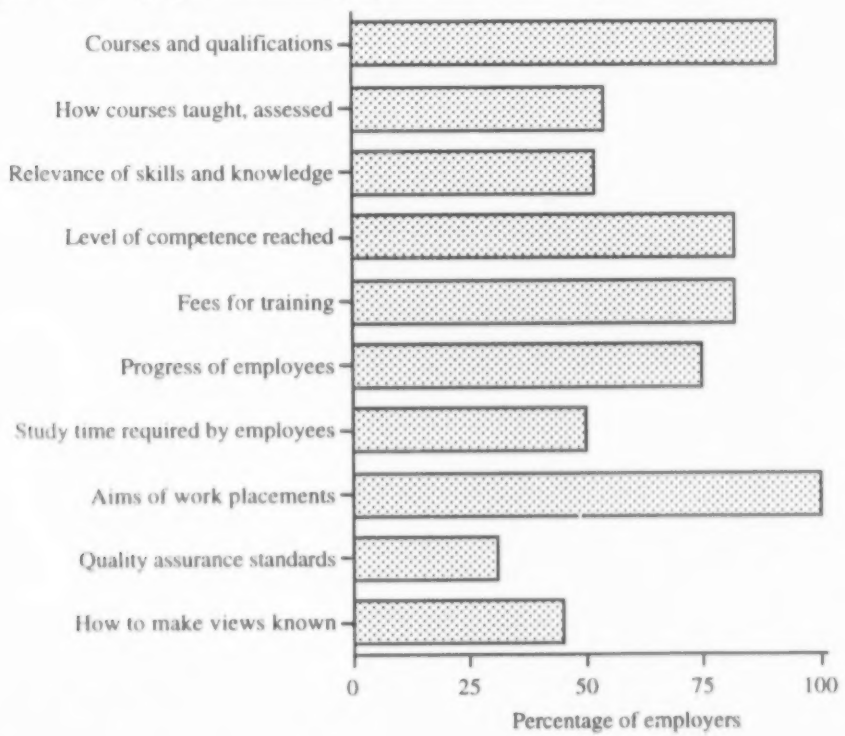
The provision of information

The FHE Charter specifies that colleges will normally be willing to provide employers with information on the following topics:

- the range of courses and qualifications offered
- how courses are taught and assessed
- the relevance to the work environment of skills and knowledge gained on courses
- the level of competence reached by students completing courses
- the fees charged for training and other services
- the progress of employees undertaking sponsored study
- the amount of study time required by employees undertaking study
- the aims and objectives of work placements for students or staff from the college
- any quality assurance standards the institution has been awarded
- how they can make their views known, and how to complain if they are not satisfied with the service they receive.

Employers were asked whether they thought the college they were involved with provided these types of information. Figure 9.2 shows the proportions of employers

Figure 9.2: Employer awareness of information provided by institutions



stating that they thought the college provided this information. These findings are very similar to those from the survey of large employers. In most cases the majority of employers thought the college did provide the information specified. Over half of the employers, however, thought that the college did not provide information on quality assurance standards and how to make their views known.

Those employers who said that the college did not provide a certain type of information were asked whether they thought that information would be useful to them. In all except one case (quality assurance standards awarded to the institution) the large majority said that the information would be useful.

Respondents were asked whether there was any information they would like to receive from the college that they felt was not provided. Several employers said they would like information on course contents and explanations of different qualifications. As in the survey of large employers, most of the sample (89%) said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the information provided by the college.

■ Communication between employers and colleges

The FHE Charter states that enquiries to institutions should be dealt with promptly and courteously, and that employers should have access to a named individual as a first point of contact who can offer advice and further information on the institution. Eighty nine percent of employers interviewed said that they did have access to a named individual in the example institution. Over 90% of the sample agreed that their enquiries to the college were dealt with courteously and promptly.

■ Making views known

The Charter states that institutions should be willing to provide information to employers on how to make their views known and how to complain if they are not happy with the service provided. Employers were asked about their knowledge and experience of the college's grievance and feedback procedures. Firstly they were asked what they would do if they were not happy with the service they had received at the college. The majority (82%) stated that they would contact a member of the academic staff. Almost all of the rest said that they would speak to someone in a management position. Over two thirds of respondents (69%) did not know if the college had a policy or procedure for dealing with complaints.

Eleven of the employers (32% of the sample) said that they had made a complaint to the college and seven of these complainants were satisfied with the outcome. When asked how they would go about making their views known to the college through feedback or suggestions, again the majority (65%) said they would contact a member of the academic staff. Sixty percent did not know if the college had a procedure whereby employers could make their views known in this way.

■ Other comments

At the end of the interview, employers were invited to make any other comments about their links with the example institution. In most cases the comments were positive. Either the employer felt they had a good relationship with the college or they expressed satisfaction with the services provided.

10 Conclusions

The preceding chapters have focused on describing the large quantity of data generated by the study. This chapter summarises the findings in relation to each of the main research questions which were the focus of the project. These questions included:

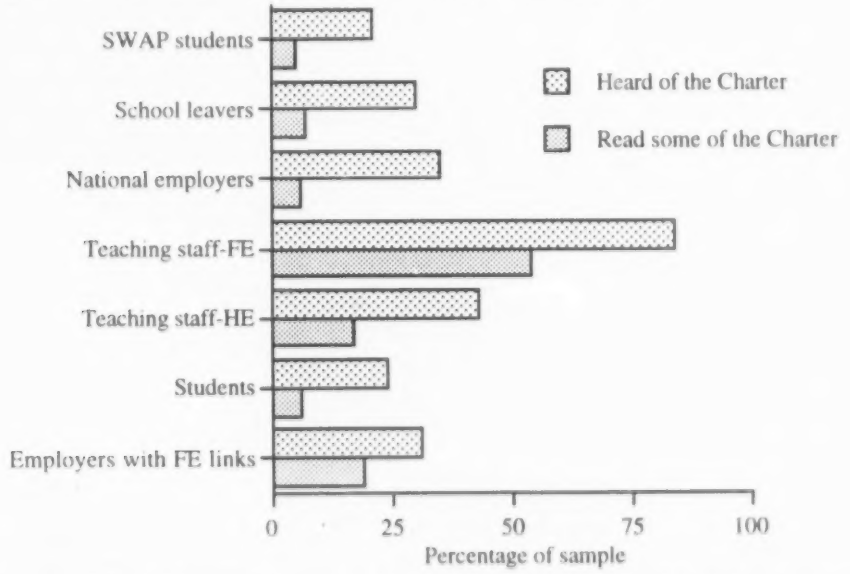
- how widespread is awareness of the FHE Charter?
- how does experience match up with expectations in the main areas covered by the Charter?
- how have institutions responded to the Charter?
- where grievance procedures are in place, how are they working in practice?

A number of issues were also raised by the data. These are discussed after consideration of the main research questions.

How widespread is awareness of the Charter?

All groups involved in the study were asked whether they had heard of the FHE Charter, and if so, whether they had read any of it. Figure 10.1 brings the findings from the separate chapters together.

Figure 10.1: Awareness of the Charter amongst relevant groups



Awareness of the Charter was very low among potential students, current students and employers. Teaching staff were more aware of its existence, particularly in FE colleges where the large majority had heard of the Charter. FE

teaching staff were the only group where a majority of respondents claimed to have read some of the Charter.

Teaching staff and national employers were also asked the extent to which they felt familiar with the contents of the Charter. Familiarity was greatest amongst FE teaching staff (32%). Only a small minority of HE teaching staff (11%) and 3% of national employers claimed to be familiar with the Charter's contents. Students and employers with links to example FE colleges were asked whether they could name any of the areas detailed in the Charter. Of those who had heard of the Charter, only a handful could name any of the areas it covers.

Related issues:

- **The FE/HE difference (p60)**
- **Publicity for the Charter (p61)**
- **Who is the Charter for? (p61)**

How has experience matched up with the main areas covered by the Charter?

Much of the Charter is concerned with describing the information to which users of FHE should have access. The research, therefore, focused on the provision of this information and whether users felt that their expectations had been met in terms of receipt of the types of information they required. In addition to specifying types of information, the Charter details standards which users can expect in relation to a number of different areas. Groups surveyed as part of the study were asked whether they felt that institutions maintained these standards.

The provision of information

1. Applicants to FHE

The majority of applicants had received at least some information on how to apply to a college or university, where to get general information on the opportunities available in FHE and getting financial support while studying. Most, however, did not report having received any information at all on how the quality of courses is monitored, where to get information on quality and how to make their views known if they were not happy. Most of these respondents indicated that they would have liked to have received information on these topics.

Most applicants to FHE had received information from some of the institutions they had applied to relating to the aims, content and teaching methods of the courses offered. These were areas identified by the Market Research Study as important to applicants in helping them to select a course and institution appropriate to their needs. Only half, however, said they had received information relating to the destinations of previous students, an area also highlighted by the Market Research Study as of central importance to an applicant's choice of institution.

2. Employers

Most employers (both national employers and those with links to example FE colleges) were sure that colleges and universities provided information relating to different aspects of their courses. They were less sure whether they could obtain information on the study time required by employees, quality assurance standards and how to make their views known. Nevertheless, satisfaction with information was high. Over 80% of employers were satisfied with the information they had received.

3. Students

Most students had received information on different aspects of their course, leisure facilities, welfare services, making their views known and rules and regulations. One area, however, appears to be of concern. Like applicants, only a minority of students had received information on the destinations of previous students. Furthermore, less than half reported receiving information relating to the careers service. Nearly half would have liked to have been given information relating to these areas. The Market Research Study identified the central importance of careers and job information to students; it would appear that in this area students expectations are not being met.

Student satisfaction with information they had received relating to courses, services and facilities and procedures and policies was high. About three-quarters claimed to be satisfied with what they had received.

Meeting the standards

For the majority of students, experience of further and higher education lives up to the standards described in the Charter. Eighty seven percent said their grant or bursary was paid promptly, 78% agreed that it was easy to make an appointment with a member of staff to talk about their course and 63% said that assessed work was returned quickly. Three-quarters agreed there was a high standard of teaching at their institution and 83% of students were satisfied with the quality of education they were receiving.

Employers were asked about their communication with universities and colleges. Over 90% of employers with links to FE colleges said their enquiries were dealt with promptly and courteously, and nearly all had access to a named individual. Among national employers, most felt enquiries were dealt with promptly and courteously in at least some of the institutions with which they were involved. However, nearly one quarter of the national employers said that they did not have access to a named individual as a point of contact in any of the institutions they dealt with.

Related issues:

- **The FE/HE difference (p60)**
- **Information overload (p61)**

How have institutions responded to the Charter?

In-depth interviews with senior staff in the example institutions allowed exploration of institutional responses to the Charter, and perceptions of its

impact. The census provided general information on the national picture. Surveys of students, teaching staff and employers with links to example FE colleges gave details of their awareness of and familiarity with institutional charters.

Institutional charters

The census revealed that almost all institutions either had, or intended to have, their own charter. Five of the six example institutions had produced their own institutional charters which were named as such. These varied in length from one page documents to small booklets and set out what students could expect at their institution. Two of them had been produced with additional information on what the institution expected of its students in return, and one had been produced in conjunction with a code of commitment. This perception of a two-way process of rights and responsibilities was thought to be an important part of the role of charters. Institutional charters, however, were perceived by senior staff to have had little impact on college or university life.

Awareness of institutional charters varied greatly between FE and HE. Eighty one percent of FE teaching staff had heard of their charter whereas only 52% of HE teaching staff knew a charter existed. Forty one percent of FE students had heard of their charter as opposed to 8% of HE students. Thirty one percent of employers with links to example FE colleges were aware of the college's own charter.

Impact of the FHE Charter

The Charter was viewed as one of a number of initiatives designed to promote quality which have an impact on college or university life. While the others, such as the Scottish Quality Management System (SQMS), were seen to be more comprehensive and to have had more impact than the Charter, many staff made positive comments regarding its impact. Despite feeling that their institutions were already doing all that the Charter encourages, staff felt that the Charter had caused them to formalise procedures and had been a useful checklist to ensure that things were being done. It had also made them more aware of the student as a customer and had raised awareness of quality issues. Some staff had improved the information they provided to their students as a result of reading the Charter.

Related issues:

- **The FE/HE difference (p60)**
- **Publicity for the Charter (p61)**
- **Who is the Charter for? (p61)**
- **Concerns about cost (p62)**
- **Promoting quality (p62)**

Where grievance procedures were in place, how were they working in practice?

The Charter invites users of colleges and universities to make their views known, and encourages institutions to publicise their complaints procedures. The majority of teaching staff felt their institution had a clear policy relating to how courses are taught and assessed; staff behaviour; and facilities and services. Less than half of HE staff felt there was a clear policy for complaints about misleading information.

Most students were unaware if their institution had a procedure or policy for complaints relating to the above areas, with the exception of how courses are taught. Despite this, the majority of students said that they would do something if they were not happy.

Senior staff were keen to stress that problems or difficulties were best resolved as close (in both time and place) to the source of difficulty as possible, without recourse to formal and therefore bureaucratic procedures. The data from the student survey suggest that this is what the majority of students would do if they wished to complain about their course, assessment or staff behaviour. Students were less sure of what they would do if they wished to complain about services and facilities or misleading information. Most employers with links to FE colleges stated that they would contact an academic staff member if they felt they had reason to complain.

While it would appear that in most cases complaints procedures are working in practice, interviews with students did highlight a worry among a minority of students that complaining would be a waste of time and might even work against them. There was also a concern among some of the 28% of the student sample who had complained that their complaints had not been dealt with efficiently, thoroughly or fairly.

Related issues

- **Information overload (p61)**
- **Suggestions and feedback (p61)**

Issues

In addition to answering the main research questions, the data raised a number of related issues. These are explored below.

The FE/HE difference

Throughout the report references have been made to differences between the responses of those in the FE sector and those in HE. These reflect different reactions to the publication of the Charter, and a different perception of the extent of its impact. They also reflect two different types of institution.

When the Charter was introduced, the SOED required FE colleges to refer to it in their development plans. The findings from the census indicate that colleges responded to this and developed their own institutional charters in advance of most HE institutions. Charters fitted into the 'customer care' ethos promoted in the FE colleges visited, and were the responsibility of senior management. The FHE Charter was well publicised amongst FE staff, and staff development sessions were organised to discuss institutional responses to it. As a result teaching staff in FE were much more aware of the Charter than HE teaching staff, and were more familiar with its contents. They also perceived the Charter to have had a greater impact on both the institution and their own work than did their HE counterparts.

Students at FE colleges were no more aware of the national FHE Charter's existence than were students at HE institutions. They were more conscious, however, of their own institutional charters. It would seem that FE colleges have

concentrated on promoting their own institutional charters to their students, perhaps because they see this as a document which they feel is more relevant to them and is a useful marketing tool. In HE institutions, however, awareness of institutional charters was very low.

Publicity for the Charter

Despite widespread distribution of both national and institutional charters, poster displays and distribution of summary leaflets, the Charter has not made an impression on students. Only a handful of students could name any of the areas it covers. One member of the SRC interviewed felt that if the SRC had been involved in promotion of the Charter then it would have had more of an impact:.

> *If we [SRC] can put forward the Charter jointly with the college management then people might take more notice of it.*

The data provided evidence that familiarity with the contents of the Charter leads to a greater perception of its impact amongst teaching staff. Perhaps if the Charter had been given a higher profile among staff and students, its impact would have been more noticeable and widespread.

Information overload

It was evident at all the institutions visited that extensive information was provided to students in the form of handbooks, course directories and induction packs. These included reference to most of the areas detailed in the Charter and were well publicised and available at all information points. They were also usually distributed to students during their 'induction programmes'. Despite this many students claimed not to have received the information. Similarly, three of the five had institutional charters which were included among the documents distributed to students yet only a minority of students were aware of their existence.

Students are bombarded with information on arrival at a college or university and it is evident that not all of it is read. It is likely that students read what they feel is relevant to them. The information which the Charter encourages institutions to provide is made available to students, even if not all of them remember it. However, most students thought that if they felt they needed to make a complaint, they would and they can obtain information to allow them to do so.

Suggestions and feedback

Constructive comments and suggestions, as well as complaints, are an important part of the process of 'making your views known'. It would appear that students are encouraged to give feedback to colleges and universities. Most teaching staff gave students the opportunity to comment about their courses, and five out of the six case study institutions mentioned that they regularly sought views and suggestions from students through feedback and evaluation forms.

Who is the Charter for?

A number of staff, both in interviews and through comments on questionnaires, were unsure who the Charter was intended for:

> *I think it's really intended for the leaders of the institutions, on the students behalf to try and get the institutions to reflect more the views of students.*

The Charter was intended to encourage institutions to maintain high standards of service and provide accurate information. It was also, however, intended to provide information to its target audience, users of FHE institutions. The Charter may have had an impact on institutions because senior management have read it and reacted to it, but as a document providing information to current and potential students its impact has been negligible.

Concerns about cost

Given that the Charter is one among many quality initiatives, there were concerns that the money would have been better invested on other areas:

> *There will be certain uses for it, but whether that merits the amount of cash that has been spent on providing it, and the amount of money that's been poured into it, I honestly don't know.*

> *The Charter is an aide-memoir ... but it doesn't seem a powerful instrument in ensuring students' rights and the quality of education ... I would rather see the money spent on actually implementing action than on Charters.*

Promoting quality

The Charter is one among a number of initiatives designed to promote quality. Four of the example institutions mentioned that they were working towards the SQMS criteria which were seen to be much more comprehensive than the Charter, and included all that the Charter was trying to achieve. In addition, reviews and audits by SCOTVEC, the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) were seen to have a lot more influence than the Charter, yet at the same time were working towards the same goals. While the Charter publicised and drew attention to quality issues, it was perceived to lack authority and strength. The following quotations illustrate the views of many staff:

> *There's no bite to it [the Charter]. If we don't achieve SQMS we'll lose LEC contracts so you are hitting the pocket. If HMI inspect us and we're not meeting the standards and measuring up to the new quality and funding initiative, they could take away 2% of our income.*

> *The bottom line is we could have ignored the Charter and still have achieved an awful lot of what we're doing.*

Finally

It would appear that the strongest message that comes from the data is that there are many influences at work in both HE and FE which all promote similar notions of responsiveness, accountability and quality assurance. The Charter is one among them. Institutions are very aware of the need to provide a quality service and all are addressing the issue. Students have access to information and there are many routes through which they can make their views known. We cannot conclude that the existence of the FHE Charter has had a significant impact. Nevertheless, we can conclude that those aspects of good provision which the FHE Charter is seeking to promote are being attended to by those involved in this study –

> *I suppose the ideal situation is that you want to get to where all of this becomes embedded and nobody actually has to have a Charter, it just happens.*

References

The Further and Higher Education Charter for Scotland, The Scottish Office, 1993.

The British Market Research Bureau: *The Further and Higher Education Charter: Report on research among students, parents and the general public in Scotland*, The Scottish Office, 1993.

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